A MOB PSYCHO 100 ZINE

Dearest Reader:

We cannot thank you enough for the wonderful support you've given to True Colors: A Mob Psycho 100 Appreciation Zine. One year ago today, this franchise had its anime conclusion, and we're sure that many of you can remember the bittersweet feeling of watching these characters overcome the obstacles in their lives and give us their goodbyes as they could finally move on.

Mob Psycho 100 is a story of found family, self-love, acceptance and SO much more. As we go and live the story through Shigeo's eyes, we can truly grasp the impact of what having "cool supernatural" powers would have in the daily life of someone who simply wants to find a way to belong, all without having to prove that they're special.

And despite the story revolving around one boy, everyone can find comfort and understanding with the cast of colorful characters that Shigeo meets on his journey, as well as the impact he has on them through the course of the series.

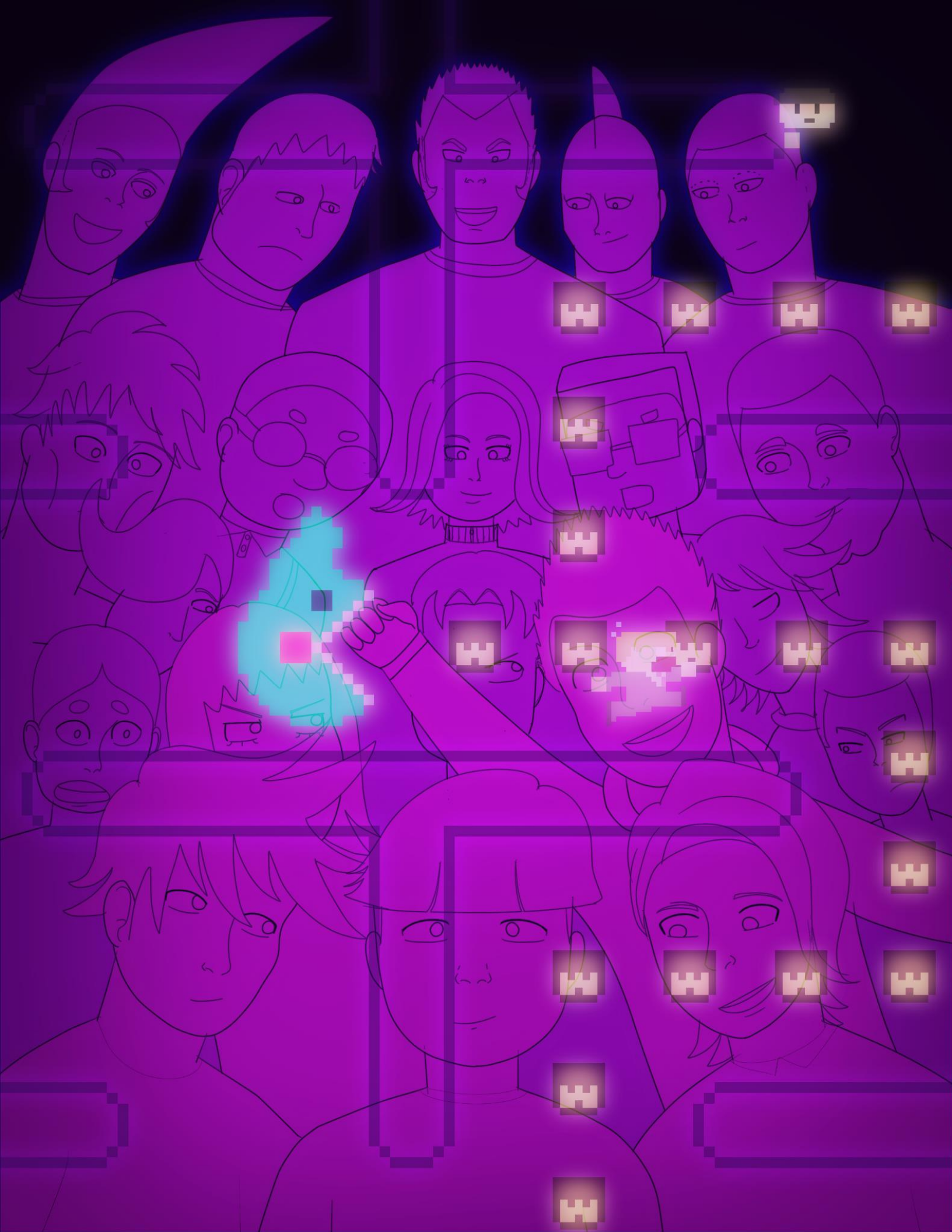
As you go through these pages, we can only hope that the pieces found within can convey the love the contributors have for these characters and how much they wanted you to enjoy them. The work everyone put into their work is truly outstanding, and Mod Alice couldn't be any more honored to have worked with such a passionate group.

With that being said, please sit back and relax, as we share what this world means to us. Wake your psyche up!

"Just as happiness shines in the shadows of sorrow, only in the darkest depths of fear does courage truly shine."

With Love, The True Colors Zine Team

YOU
CAN
DO IT!
yes I can...
yes I can...
yes I can...



reigen
@rt_k100

MIND
MIND
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control
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MIND
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The Metamorphosis

By Toyotas

It's surprisingly difficult to make it in the psychic business, but Matsuo is giving it his best shot.

He doesn't enjoy working much— at *all*, really— but it's part of re-entering society. He's leaving his old ways behind and changing for the better. After everything that went down with Claw, he won't squander his second chance at a normal, fulfilling life.

Plus, this gig seems much easier than Smile Mart.

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After a formidable showdown, Matsuo screws the lid of a tightly-packed mason jar. He couldn't quite scrape off the sticky label when he swiped it from the train station recycling bin. In its honor, he names his new acquisition *'Marmalade-chan.'* She seems sweet underneath all the thorns and teeth and acid breath and venomous belly spines. Ditzy too, lost the way she was in the client's watch gears.

This is Matsuo's first client of the day. It's also his last client, but that's irrelevant. Desperate to build a reputation for his budding business, Matsuo eagerly awaits a positive review. No shattered windows, bleeding eyes, or activated car alarms? This is one of his best showings.

The client scrunches his nose. "You're kinda creepy."

A lot of people say that. Matsuo hasn't a clue why. He sets the jar on the desk beside him, careful to avoid the congealing puddle of ectoplasm dripping through the ceiling. Gum-chan (Junior) likes to hang out in the air vents, and Matsuo can't say no to a face like that — or any of his other faces either.

"Mhm. Whatever. Anyway, I've taken care of your spirit issue. Let's discuss how you'll pay—"

"But you haven't done anything!"
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"...Eh?"

Matsuo must have misheard that. Sure, the client can't *see* spirits but certainly, he could see all the hustle.

"You didn't do a damn thing! You sat in your seat, yelled 'Come to me, beautiful creature!' and then waved around some trash." He points at the inert jar, which is sweating green. "You can't possibly expect me to pay for that."

Matsuo can't lose this guy. It'll be just like the others! And after he got fined for rooting around the recycling, he could really use the money.

"Uh, no. The spirit's *in* the jar. She put up a fight too. She's feisty. You should be proud."

The client glares.

"Do you think I'm an idiot?"

Matsuo raises his hands in awkward placation. He's not used to customer service. At his last gig, he didn't deal with much adversity; he left that to Cookie-chan's gaping maw. This whole 'turning a new leaf' thing is a lot of trouble. His terrorist colleagues were more affable.

Still, if Matsuo wants the sale, he has to earn it.

"Only someone with powers can actually *see* it. Trust me. She's in there."

He twists the lid open. Timidly, Marmalade-chan pokes her head out. "See? Speak, Marmalade-chan."

Marmalade-chan opens her jagged mouth. He coos in encouragement. He needs her cooperation. Even skeptical people can appreciate objective evidence. And objective evidence, she provides— out of her mouth comes a lovely hybrid between the squeak of a chew toy and human flatulence.

Matsuo nods. "Good girl."

A beat of heavy silence ensues.

The client snaps. "This must be some sick joke to you."

“No,” Matsuo insists. “I’m deadly serious about all of this.”

Marmalade-chan speaks again.

With a world-weary sigh, the client stands, affixing Matsuo all the while with a glare he can only describe as 'withering.' It’s worse than the way Sakurai looked at him when one of Matsuo’s new pets slurped up all the oden when neither was looking.

“I *knew* Hanako was wrong about trusting you! I knew it! No one makes a fool out of Taro. I’m taking my business to someone more qualified. I’d rather shell out for one of the spirit union offices than put up with whatever this is. At least then I’ll know I’m getting something for my hard-earned money!”

The curtain beside him ruffles. There’s a laugh, and then what sounds like audible popping from a chiropractic ASMR video enjoyed without headphones.

“And they have actual offices!” Taro cries.

Without sparing a shred of cash, Taro storms out of Matsuo’s section of the 24-hour Internet Cafe. Dismayed, Matsuo watches the curtain ruffle even after the departure. Gum-chan (Junior) drips down from above.

“It’s surprisingly difficult to make it in the psychic business,” Matsuo muses.

Especially when you’re an actual psychic.

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Matsuo learned a long time ago to pay attention when your opponent gives away a weakness. Most of the time, he’s used this knowledge to choose a strategic capsule from his belt in a fight or beat Koyama at tic-tac-toe.

The same principle applies to his latest conundrum. Even though the day’s client ran out like all the others, he left some valuable notes— knowledge Matsuo can use to legitimize his business into tangible profit.

The first thing he looks for is an office.
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Like Seventh Division headquarters, he'd like a facility well-equipped for the needs of his pets— sturdy walls and washable floors and adequate soundproofing. Unlike Seventh Division headquarters, he'd like windows. Spirits naturally gather around human activity, so a place downtown would be ideal. Something stylish and popular. Something where the people are. He wouldn't mind a cafe. Marmalade-chan has a taste for croissants.

He tells all of this to the real estate broker, who smiles enthusiastically. "We can manage all of that, sure." She types into her computer. Pauses. Gives him the once over from behind her desk. Asks, "And what's the budget?"

Matsuo relays the budget.

Her smile falters. "And you don't have any criminal history I should worry about, do you?"

Matsuo relays his criminal history.

Grimacing, she turns to her desktop monitor and types furiously.

"If you can't get me a cafe," Matsuo says. "I'll settle for a bakery or an ice cream shop."

"Best I can do is a fishmonger."

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Matsuo takes the lease.

He pays the first month with a loan. Initially, his financial advisor offered a sky-high interest rate. Matsuo accidentally stumbled and accidentally dropped the lid of his poison jar and a corner chunk of polished executive mahogany accidentally disappeared. The advisor gaped at the stubby bite marks in the wood and miraculously discovered a lower borrowing rate. After a mild scolding, Marmalade-chan got two croissants that afternoon.

There are pros and cons to the new office. It's small, the ceiling leaks, and his newest pets are exclusively water types. Nevertheless, the real estate broker did him a solid. What the new office lacks in pleasant aroma, it makes up for in street visibility. His business sits on a highly-trafficked corner, overlooking a downtown pedestrian square.
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Most importantly, it's *his* office. He's a step closer to legitimacy. Thus, Matsuo addresses the next chunk of critique— his marketability.

He starts with advertising. Since he doesn't own a phone or a camera, he takes a few photostrips of himself and his pets at the mall photo booth. It's a shame that film doesn't capture them. Marmalade-chan has a nice smile. Toothy.

After he exorcizes his Claw scar from the pictures with a few expertly-placed ghost-themed stickers, he scribbles *'weekly specials— 90% off!'* in Sharpie in the margins. Alongside that, he adds the contact number for the payphone outside. The fish market agrees to tape it in the window, but only after Matsuo buys a pound of day-old shrimp.

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It's one thing to attract clients— but Matsuo has to keep them around. If rent is a regular thing, his clients have to be too.

"This must be some sick joke to you."

He has to do something to reassure even the most clueless people that something's happening or it's all for naught. Still, it's hard to imagine life without the privilege of supernatural company.

Matsuo has seen evil spirits his entire life. He reached for the tiny will-o-wisps outside his window as a baby. He confided in the spirits around him through all the incessant bullying in middle school. When he winced in pain the night he endured the curse scar over his eye, Cookie-chan whined and licked his hand in sympathy.

"Cookie-chan…"

He has new pets. He named them after ones exorcized back then. Even if he did it in their memory, it hurts when he thinks about them.

He'll figure something out. For clients. For rent. For fitting in with society. And even more— so that he'll never watch his beloved pets disappear again.

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Even after he does all the research on the middle school urban legends message boards, Matsuo still doesn't get it. *But,* he supposes as he stir-fries shrimp for Marmalade-chan's second dinner— some people are a bit out there. As his spirits acclimate to a life of peaceful domesticity, Matsuo too can adapt.

He cuts up some recycled paper for homemade spirit tags. He labels a filled-up squirt bottle *'holy water.'* He steals MobDonald's salt packets, purifies them with his powers, and pours the mix into a travel pouch.

"No," he cries, slapping a curious tentacle away from the hazard. "Bad girl. Not for you."

He ties the pouch to his belt. It takes the place of a capsule. It feels wrong. Instead of arming himself against the horrors of the unknown, he's performing a silly magic show. Is this really how clients want him to do things?

He practices his throws against a dartboard hung on the wall. On the bullseye, there's a picture of Suzuki Toichirou. He misses by a few inches, but the sentiment is there.

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He's never dealt with a dress code before— Claw said to look cool and awesome and epic and then gave him a glue gun and a couple hundred yen for the thrift store. In general, he likes bright colors, patterns, and textures.

After he yawns at the white dress shirt section for the third time, a department store associate comes to his aid.

"Some of my clients said that I seem sketchy," he says. "Or they think I'm a total fraud. I'd like new clothes that make me look not like that."

"How do you normally dress for work?"

Matsuo looks down at his ensemble.

She purses her lips. "Ah. We'll start from scratch then." Matsuo follows her to the dressing rooms. Marmalade-chan hisses at a display mannequin.
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With its stiff seams and heavy layers, Matsuo's trial two-piece suit feels restrictive. It's not the ideal wardrobe choice for crawling into tight spaces or climbing fences or dodging evil spirit laser beam eyes. While it's a nice break from the sea of blue, black, and navy, it's utterly boring— another plain shell over a white button down. He mourns his colorful stripes.

"I think the shade suits you," says the associate.

He smooths a hand down a pressed jacket sleeve. Maybe it's not so bad. It's too long for him. He'll need alterations. He tugs at his lapels, fiddles with the pockets, buttons the waist. He'll remind the tailor to leave room for his utility belt.

"Would you like to see it with the tie?"

"I guess," he says.

"Color?"

"Green."

Marmalade-chan slithers from her perch over one of the dressing room stall hooks. She's trained enough not to drip ectoplasmic goo over the dress shirts he hasn't paid for but not well enough to stop nibbling on the empty wooden hanger. "What do you think?" he asks his ghostly companion.

Marmalade-chan makes a noise like a set of acrylic stiletto-tipped nails raked over a chalkboard.

Matsuo's lip quirks. "Huh. Interesting perspective."

It didn't strike him when it hung on the hanger, but now, with it hanging over his body, maybe he understands. There's a weight to a suit. A certain image it conjures. A respect it garners. A price tag it demands. Even down to the last pleat, the last stitch, Matsuo can feel the difference.

"I'm so sorry, sir," the associate tells him on return. She offers an apologetic head tilt. Behind her, Marmalade-chan also tilts her head. "We're all out of the green. It's popular lately. But I have another less-popular color in stock if you'd like to try."
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He tries it on, tugging it through the space left under his stiff, starchy collar. He fumbles with the knot. He calls for assistance again. He learns how to tie a tie.

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There's one final step in the plan.

Matsuo unscrews the cap to the concealer tube he bought from the convenience store. It might not be the right shade. He's never done this before. He brushes his hair back, wonders if he should cut it short. Involved in Claw for so long, he struggles to remember life without the scar. He doesn't recall much of anything from the time before.

He gazes into the hand mirror.

This past week was about change. It was about becoming a better person. Even without the concealer, his reflection irks him. Not because it's alien— there's something else.

"It's the look of a legitimate psychic," he reminds himself. That's what that client insisted. It's more than there. He can't put a finger on it. As he takes in the office space around him— photos pasted on the walls, discount specials, loose bags of salt— a strange deja vu washes over him.

He fidgets uncomfortably.

It crinkles the light gray suit.

He pulls at the pink tie.

"Actually, I kind of look like R—"

His thoughts are interrupted by a knock on his door. He sheathes the concealer and sets down the mirror. Marmalade-chan opens the door with her needle-like incisors.

"Letter for you," says the fish shop owner, reaching into his stained apron to pass along an envelope that reeks of dry ice and octopus bits. "It came yesterday, but it was stuck in my copy of *Mollusks, Monthly.*"
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The fishmonger leaves as quickly as he came. Marmalade-chan snaps at his heels before the door shuts. Matsuo tosses her a tennis ball from the basket on the desk for enrichment while he reads the correspondence. She squiggles across the floor to fetch it.

"Wha—? *Asagiri?"*

He squints at the cursive text of the letter masthead in disbelief. He might have lived under a rock for years— but even he knows who the richest man in Seasoning City is.

Please consider attending, the letter urges. *We reached out because of your extensive experience with evil spirits.*

Evidently, Asagiri knows who Matsuo is too.

Protecting those I love is urgently important. There is no price too high to ensure my family's safety. Signed, Asagiri Masashi.

"Huh…" Matsuo glances over to Marmalade-chan. At the other jars and capsules and pots and bottles lining the wall-mounted shelves. At his distorted reflection in the hand mirror and the white-and-pink ridges of the scar over his eye.

"Marmalade-chan," he says, "How'd you feel about a sibling?"

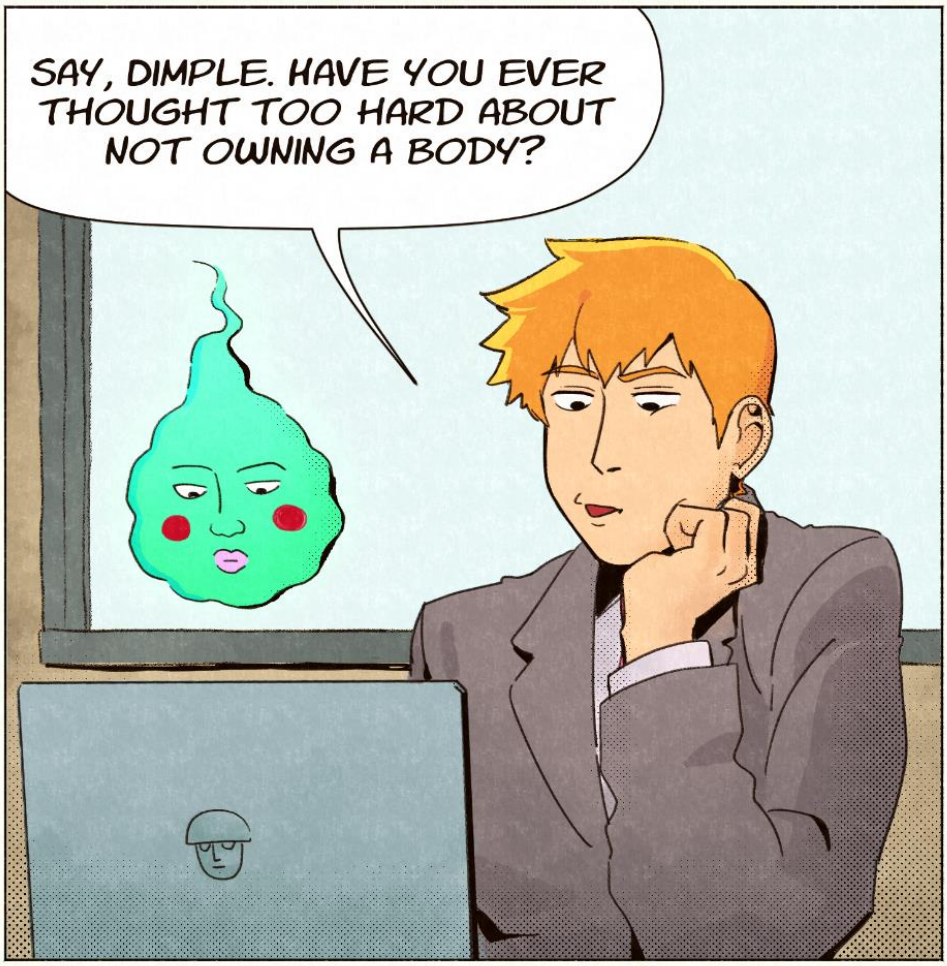
Marmalade-chan eats the tennis ball.

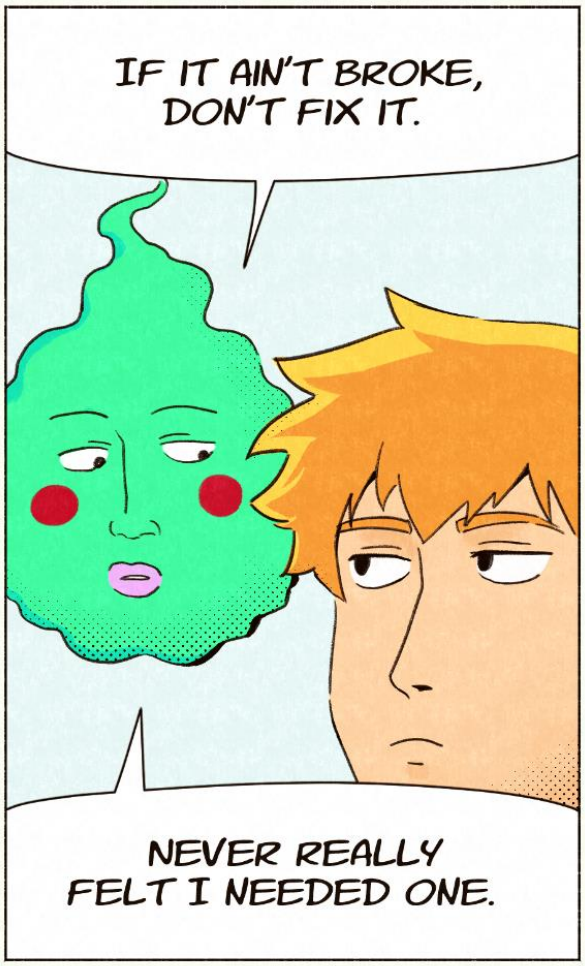
He nods emphatically. "That's exactly what I thought."

He RSVPs yes. He loads up his belt with his strongest spirits, the ones he found, raised, and trained so meticulously. He packs spare capsules and potions and ethers and Gum-chan (Junior)'s favorite beat-up chew toy. He leaves the salt behind. The posters stow into his desk drawer. The suit and tie drape over the chair. If it's a fight with a real evil spirit, they won't do him any good.

It's surprisingly difficult to make it in the psychic business— but Matsuo will give it his best shot. Even if it's creepy.

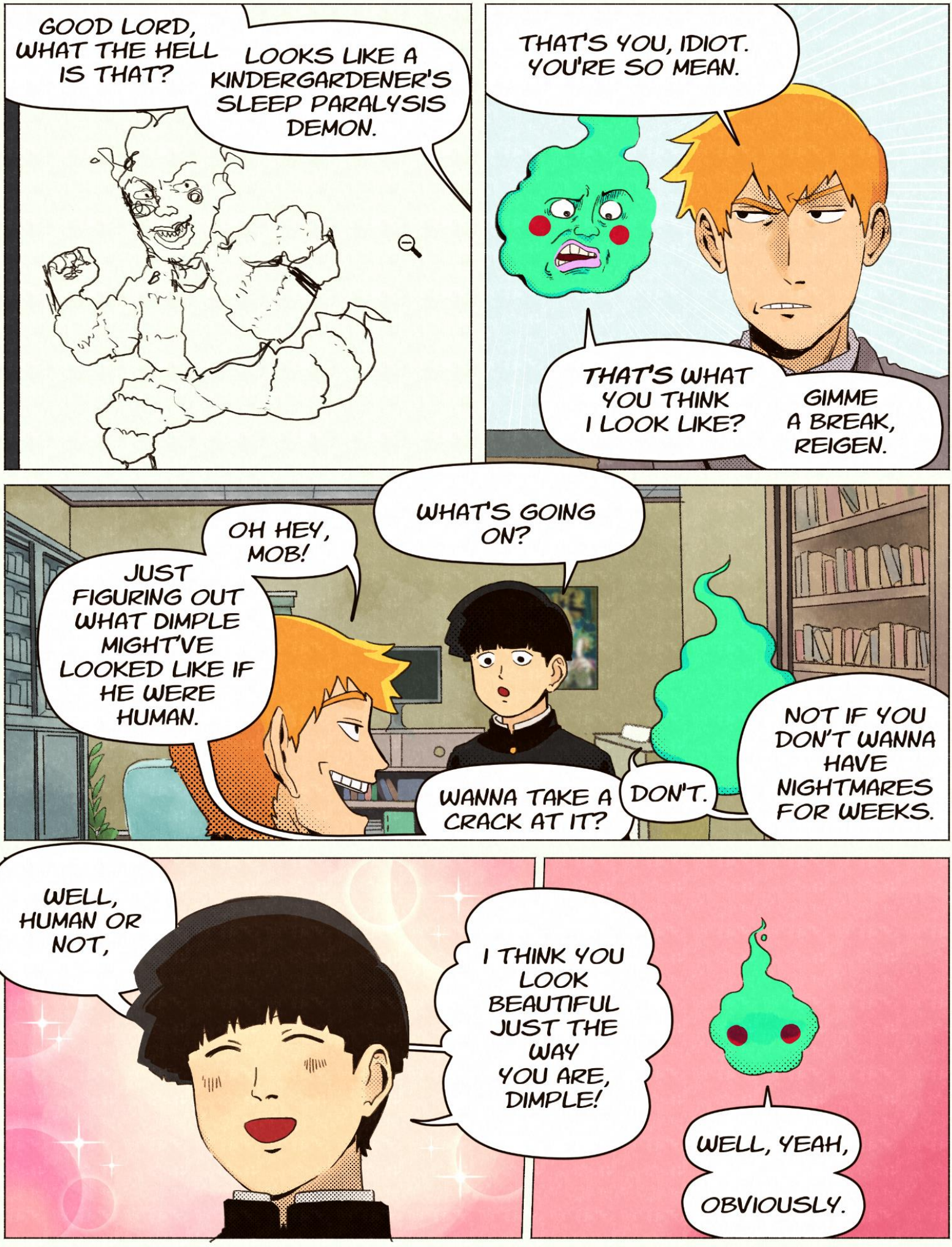
SEEMS LIKE YOU'RE DOING WELL.
YO...

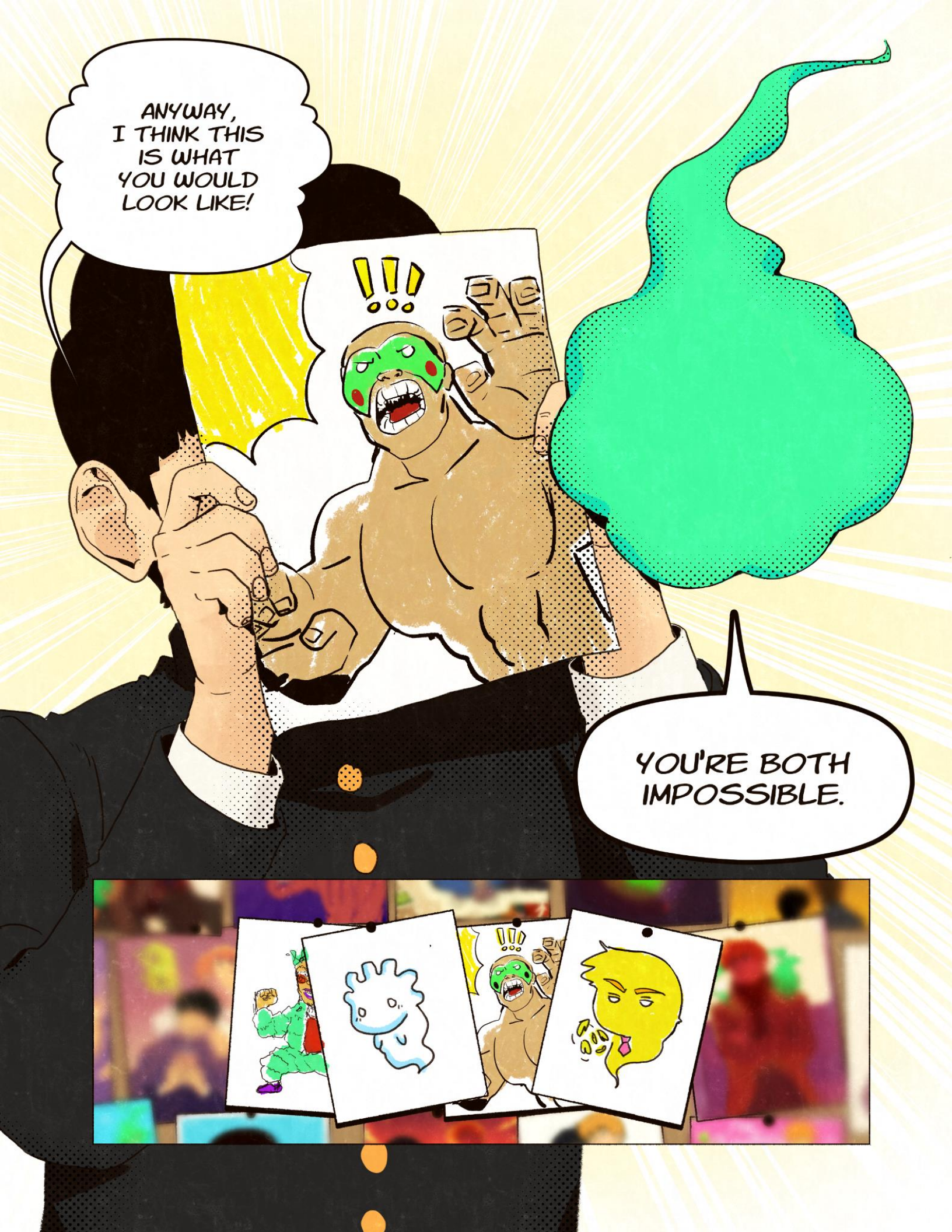

SAY, DIMPLE. HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT TOO HARD ABOUT NOT OWNING A BODY?


IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT.
NEVER REALLY FELT I NEEDED ONE.

NO, BUT HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT YOU'D LOOK LIKE IF YOU DID?
. . .

. . .
ALRIGHT, WHAT ARE YOU ON ABOUT, REIGEN?

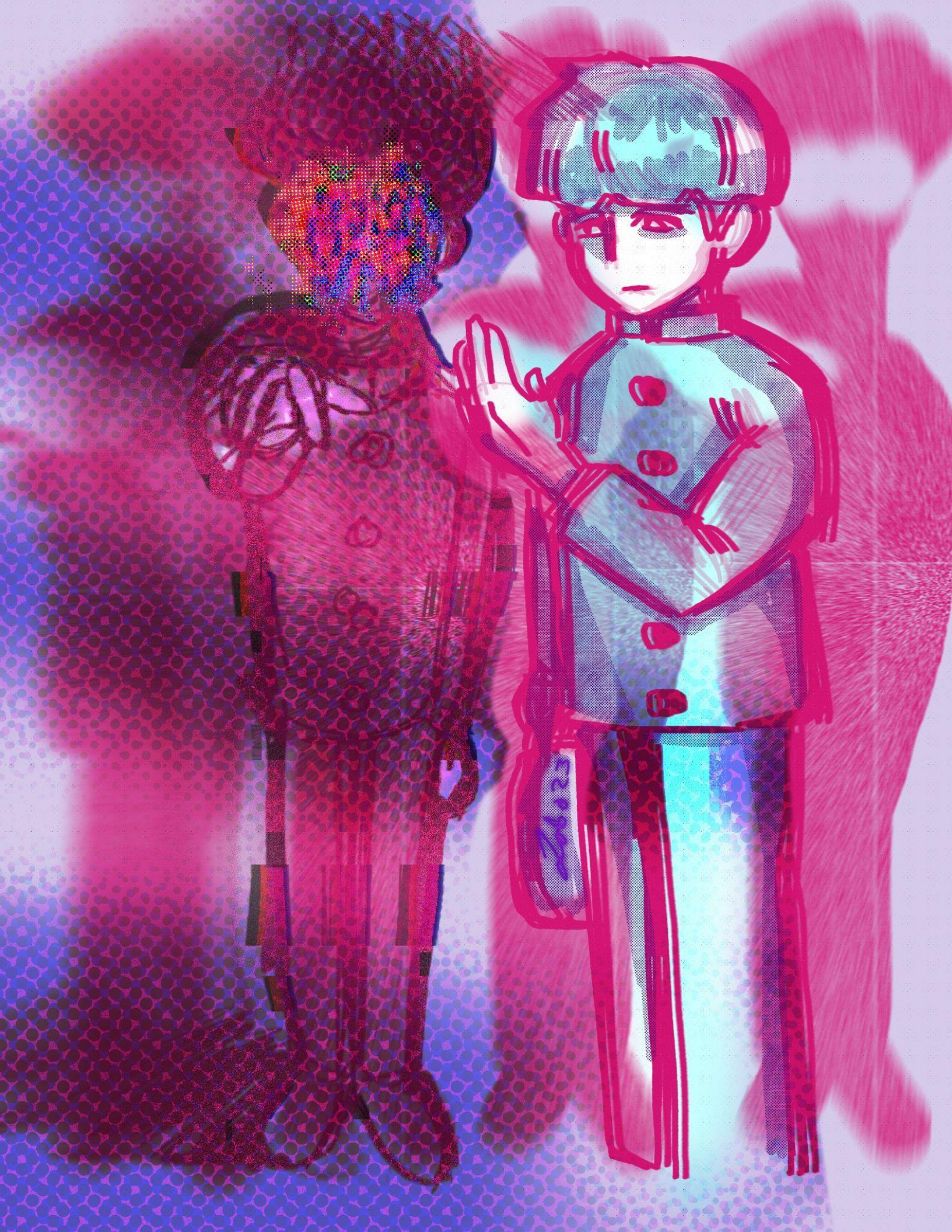

GOOD LORD, WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?
LOOKS LIKE A KINDERGARDENER'S SLEEP PARALYSIS DEMON.
THAT'S YOU, IDIOT. YOU'RE SO MEAN.
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK I LOOK LIKE?
GIMME A BREAK, REIGEN.
OH HEY, MOB!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
JUST FIGURING OUT WHAT DIMPLE MIGHT'VE LOOKED LIKE IF HE WERE HUMAN.
WANNA TAKE A CRACK AT IT?
DON'T.
NOT IF YOU DON'T WANNA HAVE NIGHTMARES FOR WEEKS.
WELL, HUMAN OR NOT,
I THINK YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL JUST THE WAY YOU ARE, DIMPLE!
WELL, YEAH, OBVIOUSLY.

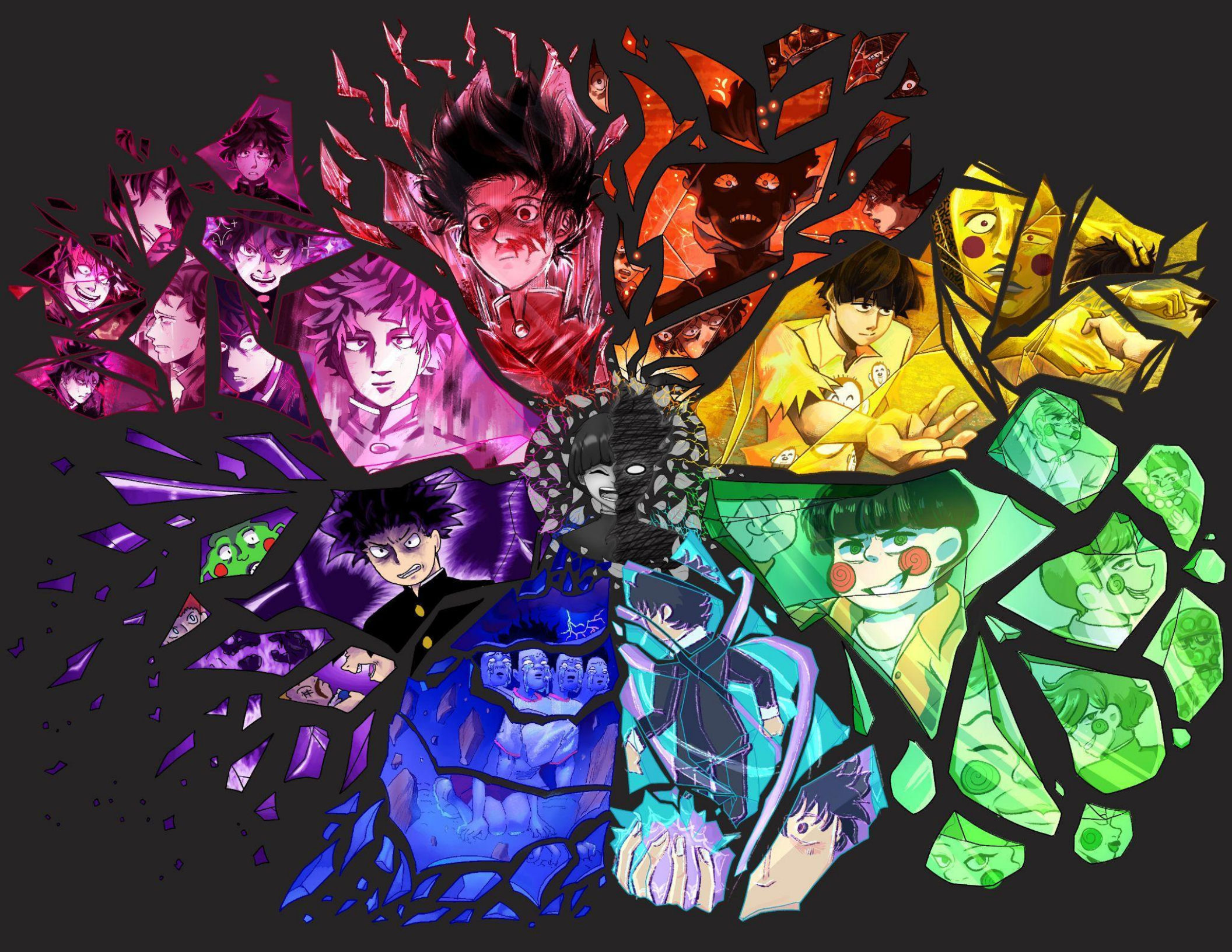

ANYWAY, I THINK THIS IS WHAT YOU WOULD LOOK LIKE!
!!!
YOU'RE BOTH IMPOSSIBLE.

100% NUTRITION
Mob
MILK

BRUH

Mob
Mo Sh
Mobs
M Sh
Mo Sh
Mob
Mob Mob Shigeo
Mob Mob Shigeo
shigeo
shigeo





Bonus

By Hal

It was after a certain, rather arduous exorcism involving a number of feral chickens, that Reigen-san first invited Serizawa to get takoyaki with him and Shigeo. Serizawa had still been picking feathers out of his sleeves as Reigen-san flung the client's sliding door open and announced they were heading back.

"I think that went well," he announced, tucking a little envelope of cash into his front pocket. As he did so, a number of feathers fell out and fluttered onto the dirt path. "How about a little bonus? My treat."

Of course, it was poor business etiquette to refuse a gift from one's boss. Serizawa straightened up his back, banged his head against the wind chime hanging off the awning, and announced "y-yes sir!" in a voice just a little bit too loud for a residential area. Granted, it *was* more rural than their usual clientele— this job had taken them twenty minutes out of Seasoning City by train to an area which Reigen-san had been referring to as 'the sticks' under his breath when he thought no one could hear him. Serizawa could, though. He tried to pay attention to everything Reigen-san said.

Meanwhile, Shigeo had just nodded, reminding them that he had to be home by six so he'd have time to do his homework. It was four forty-five. At this time of year, the sun was already starting to set.

Reigen-san's bonus, it turned out, took them one stop further than the usual station Serizawa got off at for work. The train car itself had been fairly empty, at least, with enough space for them all to sit down, though Reigen-san seemed to prefer standing up so he could tap his foot impatiently. The station was only about a minute further from Spirits & Such, and added almost no time at all to their ride back, but it was much, *much* bigger, containing its own little indoor shopping district with multiple cafes, four more platforms, and most of the foot traffic in downtown Seasoning. For the last reason alone, Serizawa tended to avoid it, even if the trains here were more frequent than the two-platform station he preferred— though he couldn't deny the appeal of fresh coffee in the mornings instead of something out of a vending machine.

Reigen-san hopped off the train and weaved through the crowd with such ease that he almost disappeared into it, leaving Serizawa and Shigeo to follow his after image.

For his part, Shigeo had little trouble with this, and Serizawa found himself envious of how little the crowd seemed to bother him as they waded through it. Voices came from every direction, with conversations blending into each other, and people appeared in their way as if they manifested out of the commotion just to block the flow of traffic. More than one person insisted on stopping right in the middle of the path just to check their phones. Above it all, the speakers in the ceiling played announcements that warned of train delays, advised people to stay behind the yellow line, or asked them not to stop in the middle of the stairs, if they would be so kind— though none of it was really audible over the sound of all the people.

By the time they made it out, Serizawa had begun to wonder if it'd be worth it to invest in a bike just so he'd never have to worry about having to set foot in a station like that again.

"There you two are!" Reigen-san called out from the entrance, hips cocked and arms akimbo. "I thought I'd be waiting out here for hours. Did you stop to use the bathroom or something? You really should've just said so, it's nothing to be embarrassed about!"

"Shishou walks very fast," Shigeo replied, more as an observation than an explanation. Serizawa wasn't quite sure what to say, so he just stood there and shuffled to the side so people could pass through.

"Well, anyway," Reigen-san said, "it's not too far from here. You can keep up for another block, yeah?" He started walking before either of them could even answer.

Serizawa leaned over to Shigeo as they both tried to keep pace. "Ah, when Reigen-san said *'a bonus,* '" he said, "what exactly did he, uh, mean…?"

"He's getting us takoyaki," Shigeo replied.

"Ah. I've never had takoyaki before."

"Shishou likes takoyaki," Shigeo said, "I think it's alright. But he usually eats most of it anyway, so it's okay."

The place Reigen-san led them to was not, as Serizawa had expected, a restaurant, but rather just a kitchen with a window facing to the street for ordering.

The man at the till knew Reigen-san by name and didn't even ask for his order— Reigen-san just told him "the usual," tossed two thousand-yen bills in the tray, and the man disappeared beyond Serizawa's view. In only a few minutes he returned with a brown paper bag that he handed over to Reigen-san, who turned on a dime and started marching away.

"People always ignore this place because it's hard to find, you know? Sometimes I even forget where it is myself! But this is the best takoyaki in Seasoning City!" Reigen-san declared. "Probably the best stuff in Japan, even! I mean, sure, you'll get fresher ingredients if you're closer to the coast, but that won't matter if you've got a mediocre chef at the helm…"

He kept talking the entire way back to the office. Serizawa had tried to keep up, really. He'd done his best. But as soon as the topic had switched from takoyaki to hand lotion to how pointless one-yen coins were in the span of a minute, he had resigned himself to just nodding in agreement with whatever came out of Reigen-san's mouth. That's what he would have done anyway, really. Reigen-san didn't say much he ever disagreed with.

At first, this had worried Serizawa— he feared he was growing complacent again, letting himself not think about what he was doing. But when he did speak up, Reigen-san never got angry. He never reprimanded Serizawa for asking for clarification, or even disagreeing on those few rare occasions. When clients brought in cursed objects, he would always ask Serizawa's own opinion on the matter, and he'd listen with interest whenever Serizawa *did* have something to say. And Shigeo, too, quiet as he was, always tried to answer Serizawa's questions as best he could. And when he didn't know the answer, Dimple would pitch in— Serizawa still wasn't sure how he felt about Dimple, but even with how crass he could be, he never treated Serizawa any differently than anyone else. Working at Spirits & Such had made Serizawa feel more like a person than he had since he could ever remember.

They returned to the office at about a quarter after five, with Reigen-san in the lead and Serizawa bringing up the rear. Reigen-san set the brown paper bag down on the coffee table before dropping himself down into one of the arm chairs. A savory smell filled the room as he dug the little cardboard containers out of the bag, and Serizawa sat down across from him, still stiff as a board. Shigeo sat on the other side of the couch, waiting patiently as Reigen-san opened up the box.

Takoyaki looked just about the same as it did in anime.

Each ball was brushed with a dark brown sauce and topped with generous helpings of mayonnaise and bonito and, in Serizawa's opinion, a few too many green onions. The smell was thick and heavy, still as savory as it had been earlier, but with something tangy mixed in that hit the back of his throat and made his mouth water. Serizawa watched as Reigen-san skewered one of the takoyaki and popped it into his mouth in one bite, shouted as it burned his tongue, and then swallowed the whole thing at once, leaving his face bright red.

"Ah, don't forget to cool yours off first, Serizawa!" he choked out, adding a shaky thumbs-up, which looked less encouraging than he probably thought it did. Serizawa wondered if he ought to be writing this down. Once he was back at his desk, assuming he didn't forget, this would go in the notebook with the rest of Reigen-san's advice in it.

Serizawa took a toothpick and plucked one of the takoyaki from the carton. It slid right down to where he pinched the wood and left a smudge of slimy mayo on his fingers. He blew on it twice before it started to sag under its own weight, and fearing for the safety of his only dress pants, Serizawa shoved the whole thing into his mouth as Reigen-san had.

It was, at least, not as hot as Reigen-san's had been— but the texture was such an odd thing that he barely felt like he tasted anything. After biting through the surface, the dough was gooey, and seemed almost undercooked, but Reigen-san was far too scrupulous to buy his employees uncooked takoyaki. This, the firmness of the octopus, the crunch of tempura scraps, and the crispness of more green onions hidden inside made for far too many textures happening at once, and he panic-swallowed before he really got the chance to taste it.

He took another takoyaki, this time prepared for the feeling of it and determined to figure out the flavor. The first and most overwhelming was that of the sauce, which was that tangy, slightly vinegar-y smell from before. The mayo cut into it a bit, and brought out the fishier flavor of the octopus and bonito, which in turn spread itself into the taste and texture of the dough and the *tenkasu*, leaving a fishy, yet not unpleasant aftertaste that felt like it would last for the rest of the evening.

He wiped the mayo off his fingers with a napkin, and then realized that in the time it had taken him to eat those two takoyaki, Reigen-san had cleared the carton.

“People often overlook that place because it’s cheap, but that’s really the best takoyaki in the city,” Reigen-san said, waving his hand about while holding a toothpick in between two fingers like a cigarette. He had a bonito flake clinging to his lower lip. “The owner understands the importance of economical pricing! More expensive doesn’t automatically equal better quality. In fact, sometimes things that are expensive are worse.”

Serizawa thought this was very wise. He’d have to write that down, too.

Shigeo excused himself shortly after. And then, after what felt like an even shorter amount of time, Reigen-san was locking up the cash box in his desk drawer, and Spirits & Such was closed for the night. Having already done most of the cleaning earlier, Serizawa just sort of waited around for Reigen-san to be finished with the tasks he refused to delegate— which were most of the tasks still. Serizawa had learned early that for as much as he complained, there were some things that Reigen-san would simply not be happy with unless he was doing them himself. He was rather specific like that.

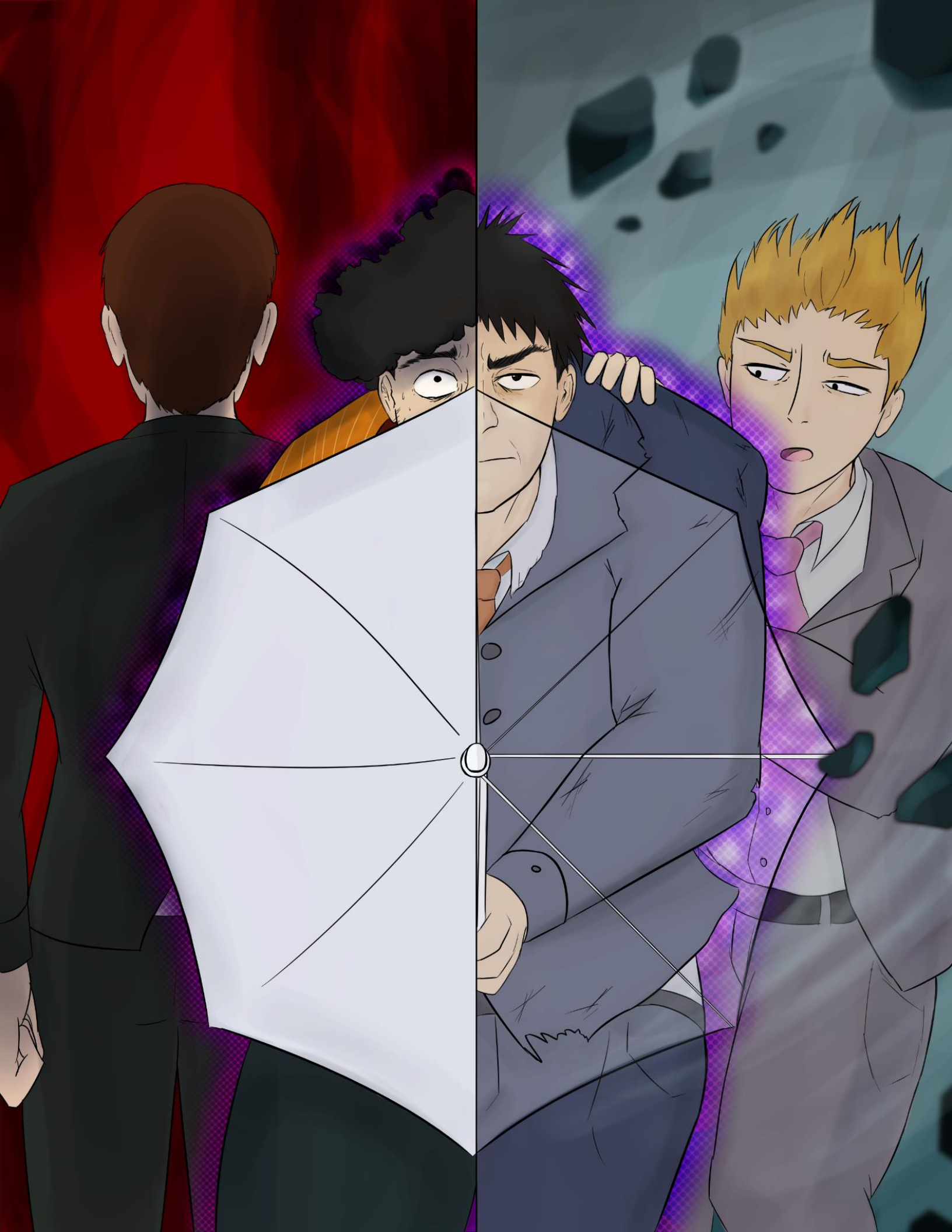
“You don’t have to wait up for me, you know,” Reigen-san said, finally flicking off the light and shutting the door behind him.

“Ah, I know,” Serizawa replied, “but I, uh, wanted to thank you for the bonus. I hadn’t tried takoyaki before.”

Reigen-san seemed at first surprised by this, before he schooled his expression into something more neutral. “Well, there’s lots of new experiences out there, Serizawa!” he replied, clapping him on the back with a firm hand. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of. Even I have things I haven’t gotten around to yet!”

“Oh! Like what, Reigen-san?” The two of them started down the steps, walking in tandem even through the narrow stairwell. Reigen-san seemed to light up at the opportunity to elaborate.“Well, there was this one time I was at the convenience store and I saw a new flavor of fried chicken that wasn’t available before, but the next time I went they were completely sold out, so I…”

And as they walked to the station—the small one, the one Serizawa liked—he listened to Reigen-san speak, letting his voice melt into the comfortable background hum of the evening commute. And when his train arrived, Serizawa bowed and thanked Reigen-san for the takoyaki again—and he said to think nothing of it, and a million and a half other words that Serizawa didn’t catch before the doors closed and the train rumbled away, leaving them unheard on the platform. And as Serizawa got ready for bed that night, he found himself doing something else he’d never done before—looking forward to tomorrow.



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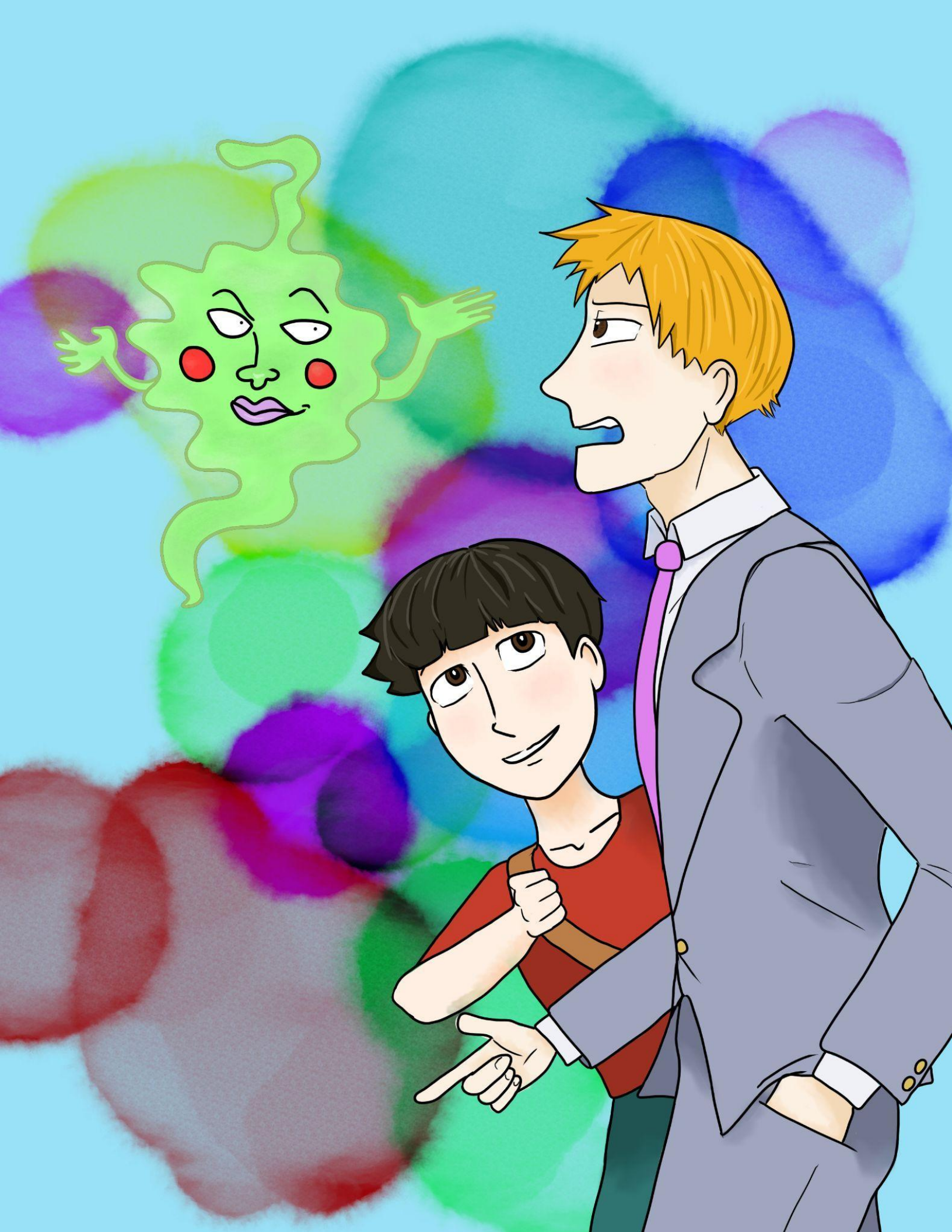
MENU

KURATA

I want to stay alive!



GET READY!
WAKE YOUR PSYCHE UP, MOB!

Life and Tomatoes
abovo_adastra

Life And Tomatoes

By Jukes

Seasoning City takes time to learn to breathe again in the wake of Mob's 'incident.' It quickly becomes a test of Reigen's ability: to see how well he can handle sitting and twiddling his thumbs without a care in the world.

As expected, it goes excruciatingly poorly.

Reigen groans, slipping down the couch for the fifteenth time that day. The curtains are drawn, the only hint to the blaring afternoon sun being the thin streaks that peek out around the edges. Even so, it's already becoming warmer than Reigen would have anticipated so early in the year. *"I guess things really have changed",* he muses.

All the same, it's been five days since the day he told the truth, and he feels more or less exactly the same. He lolls his head to the side, eyes sliding shut and threatening to send him into yet another unplanned nap, when his eyes land on a brown blob in the corner of the room. His eyes refocus, and the dingy house plant comes back into view.

Huh. He'd forgotten about that one. It'd been an attempt to apply himself to something better than what he likes to call a business. Of course, the novelty had worn off fast, and it'd become something to fill space more than anything else.

Now, it stares back at him imploringly. The boom of far-off construction shakes the house just enough for it to wave its pathetic little leaf at the edges. Honestly, it's a miracle it isn't dead already.

"You wouldn't want me as a caretaker," he warns. "Just another mess you really don't want to get into. Trust me."

It doesn't respond. *"Come on, Arataka, what do you even think it is? What you are?"*

He heaves a sigh, twisting around on the couch so his back is facing towards it, and wrenches his eyes shut. But the waving of the leaf is palpable in the silent apartment, lifeless and empty, and it doesn't leave him be, even when he slowly drifts off to sleep.

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Reigen returns to the office a few days later, much to Serizawa's vocal dismay. He's a bit surprised by the force of it, actually, but no matter: money is money. In any case, that plant in the corner has just not stopped bugging him, and he's going to get to the bottom of it however he can. Even if it does deduct from his funds a bit. He can manage that, right?

As it stands, his apartment is not a great place for plants. The air flow is next to nonexistent, the light from the window only ever hits the same patch of the wall, and there'd be no good place to keep a healthy plant that he wouldn't be tripping over all the time. It just isn't feasible.

This doesn't entirely hit him until he's standing in the doorway with a couple pots, a few packets of seeds, and a whole sack of soil in his arms.

No… it's too late. He's come this far; he can't let a full day's pay go down the drain like that. So, after heaving his way through a few rounds of intense hesitation, the couch is flipped vertically and shoved against the far wall, jammed awkwardly beside his bed. The PC is dismantled from its desk and jammed onto the kitchenette counter. The desk itself finds a new home beneath the window, collecting every drop of sunlight and leaving none behind. The swivel chair is an island in the puddle's worth of space between the desk and the bed.

He delves into setup faster than he can think to go back on all of it. He'd gotten a variety of options, most of which he's sure he'll never touch, but he's decided to start with tomatoes and peppers. It can't be too hard, right? The tomato plant in the office has been doing fine, though that may be more of Mob's doing than his own, and peppers are sufficiently fun.

The seeds go into the pot. It feels too easy. He puts down a schedule to keep track of watering times. It doesn't feel like enough.

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A week after everything's been set up, a tiny sprout emerges from one of the smallest pots. It taunts him, surrounded by its siblings still buried beneath the soil. Even that first house plant, the one that has to go in the corner no matter what, seems to laugh. But a week is so soon, right? Maybe they just need more time.

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He forgets to water the plants before work one day and it doesn't leave him alone through all three walk-in clients. How could he? What if he gets home and they're all wilted? Or, worse, shriveled up and dead? Would they scream at him? Would the guilt stay with him forever?

He rushes home to find everything more or less the same as when he left and remembers what exactly it is he's dealing with.

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Apparently, as he'd found by accident via stray internet scroll, peppers aren't supposed to be placed in direct sunlight. With all the effort he'd put into rearranging everything, and how little space he has left, he leaves them in their place and simply prays for the best.

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Apparently, as he'd found out from one of the pamphlets he'd grabbed when he'd last stopped by the plant store, tomatoes like to have a trellis to climb onto. In hindsight, it seems obvious, and he works hard to keep from hitting himself over it. He buys a simple wire one the next time he stops by.

Three days later, he gets up for water at two in the morning and the silhouette of the thing against the moon scares the crap out of him. He moves it to the floor beside the desk, far out of view from the kitchen, and simply prays for the best.

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The prospect of succulents gets to him one cozy March evening, and four days later a set of floating wall shelves sit on his doorstep. He picks the succulents up from the store on the way home from work. After mounting the pots onto the shelves, hovering precariously over his headboard, Reigen has to take a step back and wonder: *how on Earth did we get here?*

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Someone dumps a perfectly good houseplant a block or two down the road. Reigen swears he can hear it screaming at him from across the street, so what else is he to do but pick it up?

Dragging it down the sidewalk and across the room to the final remaining unoccupied corner was no small task, but as he unfolds back to standing, huffing and puffing and wiping his hands together, he catches a glimpse of one of the few succulents perched at the edge of the desk. Spitting off from the edge of a thin, spiraling limb is one tiny red flower. He watches as it unfolds before his eyes. He hadn't even known succulents could do that.

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Only two months have passed, and yet the pots have accumulated so rapidly that they clog up his window. He's running out of space inside, but the prospect of moving outdoors scares him too much to budge. Moving out there would mean more than just exposing the plants to the elements. It'd mean putting what had started as an exercise in guilt and gradually spiraled into a silly pastime on full display. The public events of last October still spin freshly in his mind. And while Reigen likes to think he's the kind of guy to do what he wants without fear of judgment, he does very much care what people think.

So, he keeps it all locked inside. And as the seasons shift into spring, his allergies begin to get the best of him, and he finds himself questioning why he decided to do any of this at all.

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It's becoming abundantly clear that there is no space in Reigen's home for this many plants. Not that he's anywhere close to just dumping all of them… but the situation is becoming difficult to ignore. He's begun to burn through nasal sprays at an alarming rate, and the more it continues, the more his mood worsens. It's having an effect on Serizawa and the clients.

When Mob texts about coming by the office, something in Reigen's gut tells him it's because Serizawa'd blabbed to him about everything. As if he can't learn to manage some seasonal allergies! Jeez.

Mob, however, is perfectly innocuous when he walks in, takes a seat, and goes on chatting about his day. It's a welcome distraction, and besides, Reigen is happy to see him. With him having moved on to focus more on his social life and academics than work, Reigen happens to hear from him less and less. Which is all for the best: it has been incredible to see Mob flourish, besides how painful it has been to let go.

They've eased into an easy flow of conversation by the time Mob mentions the plant. "The tomatoes have been doing well," he comments.

Reigen follows his gaze. Ah, right, the office houseplant. Most days he seems to forget it's even there. In fact, he can't remember the last time he'd consciously thought of it. Mob's right, though; it looks happy and healthy, straight out of an experienced gardener's garden.

"You like to touch those up when you come by, don't you?" Reigen says. "I can only assume that's why they're still doing so well."

When he turns back around, Mob is staring at him a little strangely. "I stopped doing that a long time ago," he replies. "That's all you, shishou."

"What?" He turns and looks it over again. There's no way! He would have remembered watering it, looking after it, wouldn't he?

"Minegishi-san told me that some people have a particular affinity with plants," Mob continues. "It's not just a psychic thing. It's like a cat whisperer, or someone who's very good at what they do. Something they can do that comes as easy as breathing."

"It's just a plant, Mob," he sputters. "I've never been a plant guy."

Mob tilts his head thoughtfully. "Who says you can't be?"

Huh. He looks at the tomato plant, bright and lively and gleaming back at him. He thinks about his apartment, which very well could have been a full-on jungle by this point, but is instead a well-manicured garden of its own. "Huh."

"I don't know, though," Mob says, sipping at his tea. "I think you're a 'lots of things' guy. Maybe you aren't *any* particular type of guy. Maybe you're just… a guy."

"That's pretty smart, Mob," he says, though he can't stop thinking about tomatoes.

When Reigen goes home, he moves most of the pots out front and rearranges his furniture back to its original configuration. The tomatoes line up on their trellises beside the street. If someone were to reach out and snatch a few, he muses, then so be it. Odds are they must need it.

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Spring comes on in full swing, and that's when the flowers in Reigen's collection start to flourish.

It draws more people towards his apartment than he'd anticipated. While he'd known that moving the plants outside would put them on display, he hadn't anticipated *this* level of interest. With that and what Mob had told him before, he tries not to let it feed too much into his ego. The work continues on as usual, he receives a few sparse compliments here and there, and the world keeps turning.

But one day there's a disruption to this routine. Reigen is crouched out front tending to the lilies when an old woman taps him on the shoulder. It nearly scares him out of his pants, but he recovers swiftly enough to receive her as if she were a client.

As he learns, Hanako lives at a house a few blocks away. She'd been noticing his hobby for a good while and figured he might be a good resource for her own garden. It'd been failing since the loss of her son, who did most of the upkeep on the front of that old house. Now that he's gone, she has no clue where to start. The sympathetic story does get to Reigen's heart. He gives her a few pointers, lends her his trovel, and sends her on her way.

…But she comes back. Once, then again, and again, again, again. More and more often she mentions the various problems she comes across that she simply doesn't have the knowledge to tackle, and her failing physicality makes it difficult to keep up with it all.

After ten or so visits, Reigen can take a hint. When he offers to take a look at it himself, she jumps at the opportunity.

The state of Hanako's yard is worse than Reigen had expected. The vegetation has spread onto the house, creeping up the walls and making cracks where they meet the roof. They're sprawling, and so out of control that he can hardly identify where Hanako had tried to work at.

But all the same, it's nothing undefeatable. A few minutes of examination brings him to a plan on a decent time frame. Hanako is all too quick to accept, and now, every one of Reigen's Friday evenings will be spent tending to some old woman's garden. For free. Something deep within his soul howls at that, but for the inexplicable throb in his chest, it'll have to do.
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Reigen is halfway in the dirt planting some of Hanako's new saplings when a familiar voice pulls him out of his state of nirvana. It's Mob, dressed in his gakuran on a crisp autumn evening: an odd sight, indeed.

"Mob!" He says, peering over the fence. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm walking to Saruta's house to study," he says. "I didn't expect to see you here."

Reigen glances at Hanako's home, which has been faring much better in the past weeks. "Yeah. You know, neither did I."

The two of them sit in silence for a few moments, watching the sun set over the hills beyond the house. "I'm really happy for you, shishou."

Reigen raises his eyebrows. "Why do you say that?"

"I know you used to talk about doing community service, and this is like that but better," he says. "It's good for you, I think." He smiles: easy, gentle, real. "It's great. I'm proud of you. You've come a long way, too."

That smacks him right upside the head, leaving the undersides of his eyes wet.

"Hey, now," he sniffs, "That's playing dirty! Besides, I've hardly one-upped you yet. You'd better watch your back."

Mob laughs. "We'll have to see," he says. "We've got all the time in the world."

With a crick in his back and dirt on his hands, for the first time in years, Reigen can finally say he feels the same.
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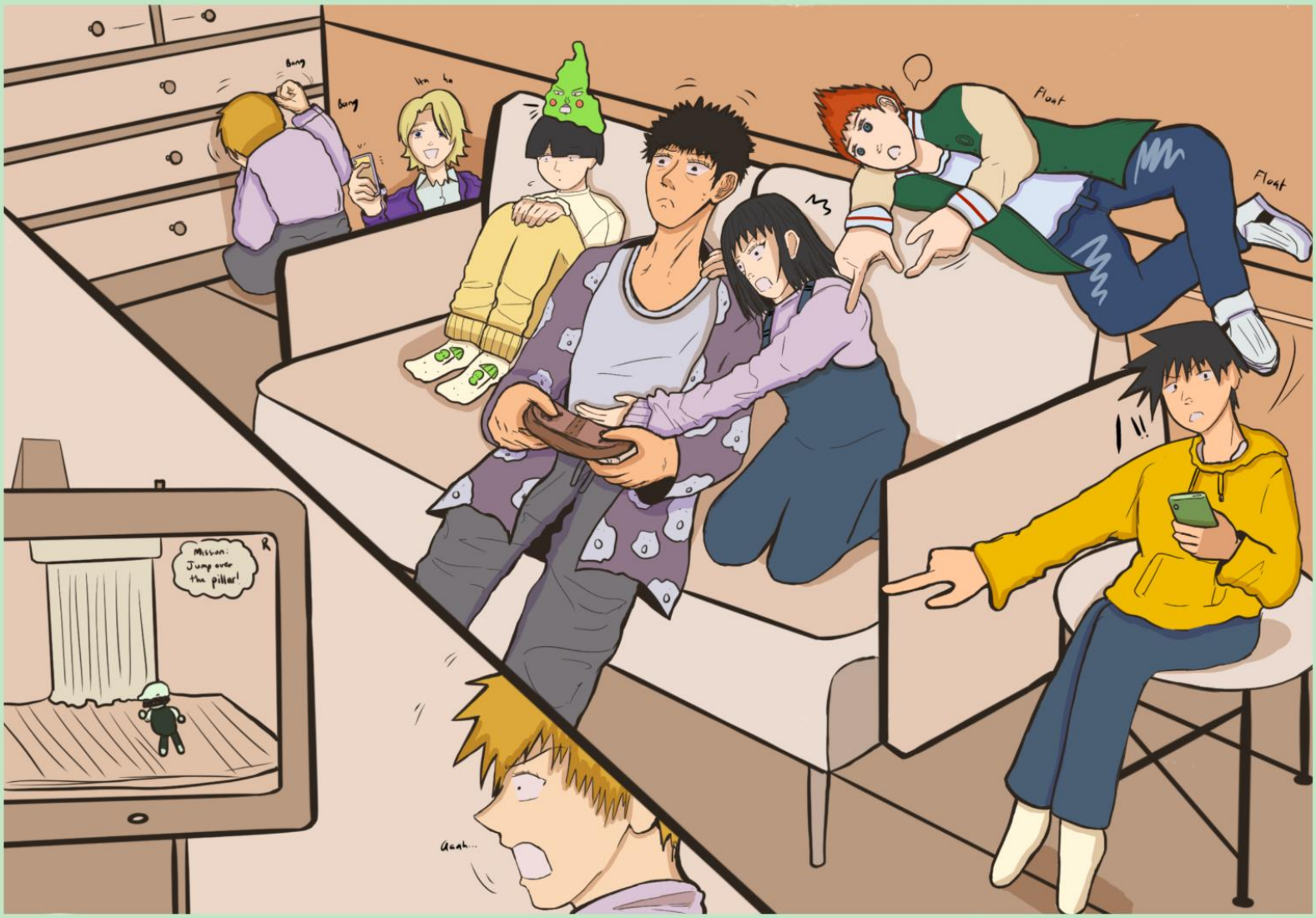
停止!!!

Uzaster
Uzaster


bang
bang
Float
Float
Mission:
Jump over
the pillar!
Aaah...

dzasta15

MOB
MOB
SPRITE KNIGHT

Midnights With You

By Caw

Smoke fills the night air in front of him, as his own posture weighs heavy on his own apartment balcony. He stares off into the dreary night sky, sparkling above him, as if to taunt him for his own pathetic feelings. Something about the sun setting, the light being tucked away, wrecked his thoughts and sent him into disarray.

He never liked staying still, allowing himself to get too comfortable in one spot. He hated the mundane boringness of a normal office worker, shackled to a desk, worrying about overtime or speech patterns, trying never to step too far out of the convenient mold that companies had made of the average working class citizen, but Reigen couldn't be like that. The grayness showered him, coating him in something sick, something that dragged him down into the depths of fatigued hours and an endless wandering mind, asking, was this *it?*

Was this why he was here?

Smoking had been inevitable. With spaces carved out for it in office buildings, alongside the dozens of balconies with ashtrays covering the metal railings, it practically turned you into a tobacco fiend. Was it the stress that killed his soul or was it his own inhibition? The way fire burned in him, how it bubbled inside, weighing him down harder than any of the endless hours of overtime or demanding reports he had poured himself over.

It had to be released, one way or another, maybe that's why his mouth started releasing smoke instead of air when he sighed, when thoughts like these weighed heavy. He thought something like this would fix him, relight something deep within him, make the person he tried so desperately to crave himself into, away from that old boring mold and societal norms forced on him at an early age, but it didn't.

It only made him feel more pathetic and with each month that passed him, each starry night that failed to encapture his heart, he felt himself grow older, more than he had any right to.

Ash fell off the balcony, rustling away with the wind, from the gentle tap of his fingertips.

The fact he lasted so long in that office life was a miracle in itself. He couldn't be chained, he hated the suffocating feeling of doing something mediocre with no passion pushing him forth, and sure, maybe he was a bit in over head, was this passion? Could it even be called that?

He had a drive for this type of work, he could do day in and day out, he had, hadn't he? He pulled himself out of the morning every day, dressing himself in his own gray work suit, and found himself in that old office space he had claimed from day one as his. Not as a worker but as his own boss, with conviction and blatantly fake confidence, he had managed.

And well, he hadn't expected for any of this to be real— *psychics,* that is.

The fact that Mob had stumbled into his office one day after school, small as can be, but more honest than everyone he ever met.

Everyone has sides of themselves they don't like. The dirty, grim, disgusting sides they like to pretend they don't have, Reigen knows his. He blasts it out to the world and tries to pretend he doesn't feel as pathetic despite all the criticism thrown his way between psychics looking down on him and the media harassing him at every chance they get, ready to make an example out of those who claim to be more than what they are.

Mob has one too, one he hardly ever wants anyone to see, far more powerful than he would like it to be, and he tries so hard to not let anyone see it.

Nevertheless, even with that, Mob was honest in a way no one had ever been and maybe it had to do with that he was a child, naive to the world and its cruel reality, but maybe that was just Mob. He didn't know how to lie and even if he did, would he?

Mob's heart was made of pure gold while Reigen's was rotting away, bit by bit, with each drag of his cigarette.

Mob was sensitive to strange things like the slightest smells or changes in textures from the way food was slightly cooked differently. He wondered what he thought of the smell of ash that lingered on his suit like a curse itself.

Mob called him his master without even thinking, putting so much faith into someone like him, who lied his way through every consultation and used what he could to pay the bills, all in an effort to not become another cog in the machine, just to not become another mindless puppet, molded by corporate greed and hierarchy.

Did he even deserve that? Even if Mob *did* know after all this time, even if he stayed beside him nonetheless, despite every stupid selfish thing he had ever done, taking granted of those besides him, did he still deserve that, after everything?

The smoke that lingered made him question it all with the chill of the night air.

How do you know you deserve the life you're given, even if you work until you are breaking, until you destroy every part of yourself and become something unrecognizable? No one is granted a thing, in a sick way, no one is owed happiness, even if you've been through hell. Yet here he was, the taste of ash on his tongue, and his mind spiraling. The balcony was cold, the metal chilling him to his bones yet he couldn't step away from it.

For all the hell he gave, for all the effort that he gave until he was bleed dry, he had no clue of anything. It was just always a new gig, a new plan, until he got bored and moved onto something else— what was he living for? Was it even himself?

He was a selfish person, he knew that. He knew that more than anyone else. He didn't mind being that type of a person, one that their society looks with scorn at. He could picture himself in an endless darkness with eyes that never faded, with bodies that strayed away, leaving him to rot alone, always searching for the next thing to keep him going.

Why did he need to stay busy, in order to stay happy? It was a stupid ridiculous thought but it curled in his mind, staying there, like the footprints of soot. His mind was dangerous on nights like these. Stupidly dangerous.

It's funny. He's supposed to be the adult, with all the answers and the plans and be able to protect Mob, the kid who had suddenly found a place in his world, and here he was, protecting *him* most of the time.

He didn’t have all the answers. He didn’t have any power either. Hell, he was hardly surviving being a working adult. He was just winging it, throwing himself at a problem and praying somewhere deep in his heart that this time it would be enough to satisfy everyone.

Color had gone bleak, rotting in shades of melancholy gray, as he began to rot away, but he’s ridiculously thankful— to Mob.

Mob didn’t fix anything. Hell, he didn’t really change anything. He was just a new person, who showed up one day, and Reigen thought, *"Fuck it."* What’s the worst that could happen?

There’s a silence between them— he wants the best for Mob, despite all the ways he’s been selfish and messed up, how his greed overtook him because for once something in this godforsaken world was working out for him and he wasn’t trying to force himself through it but then— it *crashed,* the weight of agony slammed down on his shoulders and darkness underneath his eyes began to creep up and he didn’t know how to handle anything because suddenly, he was alone and he had forgotten what that was like, thanks to Mob.

He forgot what the suffocating silence was like, instead of the peaceful silence and quiet moments of eating soba. He withered away, remembering what it was like to have no one there to turn to, to rely on, to share in his misery and his joy— weird as it was.

That’s the thing about that kid, he’s something real special, something electrifying and brightening, and there is a sense of pride that swells when he manages to do even the smallest things, whether for the girl he likes or protecting the people around him.

It makes him think selfish things like, *"That’s my kid, look at you, look at you go, I knew you could do it, kid"*, and he’s never denied he was made out of greed.

DIVINE TREE?
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Teamage 2023

SHORT STORY ONG 11/3

Ritsu Waterbending Moments

By Caro

Dimple has no sense of smell anymore, but he still imagines the musty scent in the air after yesterday's rain. Shigeo has told him a few times that it's one of his favorite smells, oblivious as always to the tactlessness of bragging about an experience Dimple can never have. He spent all day yesterday wandering around the city in his bright yellow raincoat and boots, with a barrier to keep him dry.

"No one else seems to like the rain as much as I do," he'd said to Dimple. "It's nice having someone to enjoy it with me…"

Dimple had rolled his eyes, pointedly ignoring the gratitude in Shigeo's voice. "No one else can make that barrier of yours," he said. "You probably wouldn't like the rain so much if you had to deal with it getting in your clothes. I know I wouldn't." Shigeo had just smiled at him and brought his foot down in a puddle, splashing rain water all over his jeans.

Today, Shigeo is out again, this time at a little park by the river. Earthworms cover the paved sidewalk adjacent to the grass, and Shigeo is picking them up, one by one, and putting them back into the soil. "Do you really think you'll get 'em all in one afternoon?" Dimple asks. He's staring into the river, watching little fish swimming with the current.

"Hmm… probably not," says Shigeo. "This path goes on for miles… I won't be able to go much further than this." He scoops up another worm from a puddle.

"And you're satisfied with that?"

Shigeo doesn't answer. A loud splash from downstream draws their attention. Dimple sees a figure standing on the bank, presumably throwing things into the river. "Stupid human." he mutters. "They'll scare away the fish like that."

"Do you like fish, Dimple?" asks Shigeo.

Dimple's eyes track a fish as it jumps out of the water and dives back down to the silty floor. "They're alright," he replies. "I can get whole schools of 'em to follow me around if I show myself… they're not the best minions, though. Not as good as humans."

Shigeo suddenly stands up from his crouching position. “That person…” he says. “That’s Ritsu, isn’t it?”

Dimple looks again. Sure enough, he recognizes the figure’s below-average height and unruly hair. “Isn’t he supposed to be studying?” he asks. He thought Ricchan’s days of rebellion were over, but apparently he hasn’t gotten it out of his system after all… or he just isn’t as obsessed with grades as he used to be, which is a good change in Dimple’s opinion.

Shigeo starts jogging towards his brother, Dimple quickly joining him. As they get closer, he can see Ritsu glaring at the ground. It takes him a second to notice Shigeo and Dimple, and when he does, he puts on a very convincing carefree smile. “Brother! Hi!” He puts his hands behind his back like he’s hiding something, even though they all knew he wasn’t holding anything. “Are you and Dimple having a nice day?”

It suddenly registers to Dimple that Ritsu’s hands had been glowing with his aura. He could still see wisps of aura trailing through the air. So that’s what he’s up to…

Shigeo notices at the same time. “Ritsu, are you practicing your powers?” He lights up, seemingly not noticing the look of mild panic on Ritsu’s face. “You’re trying to make a ball of water, aren’t you? Like when we were kids…”

“Um!” Ritsu relaxes slightly, letting his hands fall to his sides. “Yes. I’ve been trying for a while now, but I’m having trouble.” He fidgets with his sweatshirt. “Maybe you could-”

“Yes!” Shigeo grins for a moment, his hair ruffled by a nonexistent wind. He immediately restrains himself, returning to his usual blank expression. Dimple tries not to cringe. Ritsu’s smile gets even more strained. “Sorry, I mean… yes, I can show you. If that’s okay.”

“Of course it is,” Ritsu says quickly. “Please show me, brother. It would help a lot.”

Dimple watches Shigeo demonstrate by levitating a soccer ball sized orb of water from the river. Ritsu asks him about his *'technique'* and Shigeo says something vague about how “you should pull, not push.”

Ritsu's first few attempts end with tiny blobs of water falling into the river, but after a few minutes, he has a ball of water floating between him and Shigeo, who looks like he just watched his brother summon an angel. "That's amazing, Ritsu!" he gushes in the most controlled tone he can manage. "You're so smart… I knew you could figure it out."

He really shouldn't interfere. Ruining Shigeo's happiness at this moment isn't going to help him recruit Shigeo into his cult efforts. And this is still better than where the brothers' relationship had been a month ago. But Dimple still finds himself floating up to Ritsu. "What are you playing at?" he says.

Ritsu's gaze turns hard. The ball of water stops bobbing in the air. "What do you mean?" he says.

Dimple points at the ball, which is starting to turn to ice at the center. "This party trick is one of the first things you learned how to do with psychic powers. You showed it off to me for like an hour when I was training you." He holds Ritsu's gaze, ignoring how Shigeo's face has also turned stony. "Why are you pretending not to know it now? Do you really think playing dumb is going to impress Shigeo?"

A bolt of energy shoots towards Dimple and barely misses, bursting into sparks on the sidewalk. "Shut up," says Ritsu.

"Hey! What was that for?" Dimple flies behind Shigeo and pretends to cower. Playing the cowardly asshole comes easily to him as usual. "You got anything to say about this, Shigeo?"

His act works like a charm. Shigeo glares at him and gently bats him away. "That was rude, Dimple," he says. Then he turns back to Ritsu. "Is that true?"

Ritsu doesn't answer. His hands are clenched into fists, and he isn't meeting Shigeo's eyes. Dimple supposes he's lucky not to be exorcized right now. Shigeo plows on. "I'm not upset with you," he says. "It makes sense that you learned it so early. You can do so much with your powers already… you're really talent-"

"Stop-" Ritsu snaps.

The floating ball fully solidifies with an audible crack. Ritsu freezes and stares at the ball in awe for a moment, and it melts in his hands before he can grab hold of it. The water is siphoned off into the river by Shigeo's power, preventing it from splashing onto his and Ritsu's shoes.

Ritsu somehow looks even more dejected. He takes a deep breath before continuing. "Thank you, brother. But please stop saying that."

Shigeo looks at him innocently. "Why? It's true, isn't it?"

"Because." Ritsu sighs. "Do you want to know the real reason I came out here? I was trying to turn water to ice. Like how Teru can make fire. I thought maybe I could do the opposite, make things colder." His aura curls around him defensively, contrasting the flatness of his voice. "It wasn't working."

Shigeo actually smiles at that. This kid *really* can't get a clue. "But you did it just now."

"I know." Ritsu smiles ruefully. "Only because I was angry. When I feel fine, they don't work, but they work perfectly when I want to use them for something destructive." The pitch of Ritsu's voice is increasing. The surface of a nearby puddle starts to waver, as if a gentle wind was blowing. "The whole reason I'm practicing at all is because I thought I could use it as a weapon!" In an instant, the puddle freezes. "How can you say I'm all *amazing* when all I can do is-" Ritsu's voice cracks with the ice. He turns sharply and starts to walk away.

Before Dimple can feel embarrassed over how badly his scheme backfired, Shigeo speaks up. "Ritsu. Wait."

Ritsu stops. He doesn't turn to face his brother.

"Ritsu… I'm sorry for hurting your feelings. I'll respect your wishes, if you don't want me to talk that way." Shigeo fidgets with the sleeve of his shirt, his eyebrows furrowed in thought. "But what you're saying… it doesn't make me admire you less."

"Why not?" Ritsu's voice is small, but still audible over the rushing river. "I'm using my powers to hurt people on purpose, how is that admirable?"

Dimple thinks about how Ritsu tried to strangle a high school bully with his own tie. How he beat delinquents into the ground, and didn't speak to Dimple for hours afterwards, but still smiled for his family and classmates. How he started to eat meals alone in his bedroom, so his family wouldn't see his spoon twisting around his hand and leaving red marks on his fingers.

He pointedly does not think about the look he saw on Shigeo's face when he finally broke into the mental world that was trapping him.

When Dimple regains his focus, Shigeo is standing in front of Ritsu, holding his gaze. "Because sometimes, you don't have a choice." He clenches his fist. "Some people don't listen to reason unless you have power over them. And I'd rather you use that power than get hurt."

Ritsu scoffs, barely loud enough to notice. Dimple doubts that Shigeo noticed. "You really believe that?"

Shigeo nods. "Not standing up to people doesn't help anyone. You helped me realize that, Ritsu." He starts fidgeting with his sleeves again. "I'm very grateful that you finally stood up to me. If you hadn't, it would still be… how it was before."

Ritsu takes a big, shuddering breath. The puddle at their feet is water again. "Yeah," he says. "That sucked."

Shigeo nods again. "It really sucked." His aura surrounds the puddle. "Um… do you want to try again?"

Ritsu reaches out his aura to scoop up the water. It shies away from Shigeo's aura and retreats back into Ritsu's hand. "I think I'm done for today," he says.

"Okay," says Shigeo, seemingly unfazed. "Do you want to help me and Dimple? We're putting worms back into the grass." Dimple's interjection of *"Hey, I'm not involved in this!"* goes ignored. "Sure," says Ritsu. His smile is as fixed as always, but he genuinely seems more relaxed.

They work in silence for a few minutes. Dimple watches, occasionally getting distracted by the river or searching for more worms further down the sidewalk. Eventually, Ritsu speaks up. "What made you change your mind? About fighting, I mean."

Shigeo sets another worm on the grass, looking thoughtful. “I’ve just been thinking about it lately,” he says. “You know, after everything.”

Ritsu flashes a questioning look at Dimple, who shrugs. He turns his focus back to Shigeo. “You mean, after what happened with Claw?”

Shigeo hums. “Yes. And, with those high schoolers the other day.” He stands up, wiping his hands on his hoodie. “I want to stand up to people like that from now on.”

“You don’t have to-”

“I know I can rely on you, Ritsu,” says Shigeo. His expression is serious. “But you won’t always be there. And I want to be a reliable person, too.”

Ritsu’s brow furrows. The wet sidewalk under his feet grows icy, then melts as Ritsu forces himself to relax. “Okay,” he says pleasantly, no hint of frustration in his voice. “But I’m here now, so if you ever need anything…”

“I know.” Shigeo smiles and turns away, reaching for another worm. “Thank you, Ritsu.”

Dimple frowns. Clearly, Shigeo can’t tell that this conversation didn’t go well. He decides he’ll talk to him about it later. Flying over to hover in front of Ritsu, he says, “You know, Ritsu, if you ever wanna learn some new tricks, I could always possess you!”

“No.”

“Hey, don’t say that so hastily!” Dimple turns towards the preoccupied Shigeo. “I know all sorts of defensive moves! Tell him, Shigeo!” Shigeo doesn’t stop what he’s doing, but he responds, “Dimple’s right, Ritsu. He’s very good at fighting.”

“See!?”

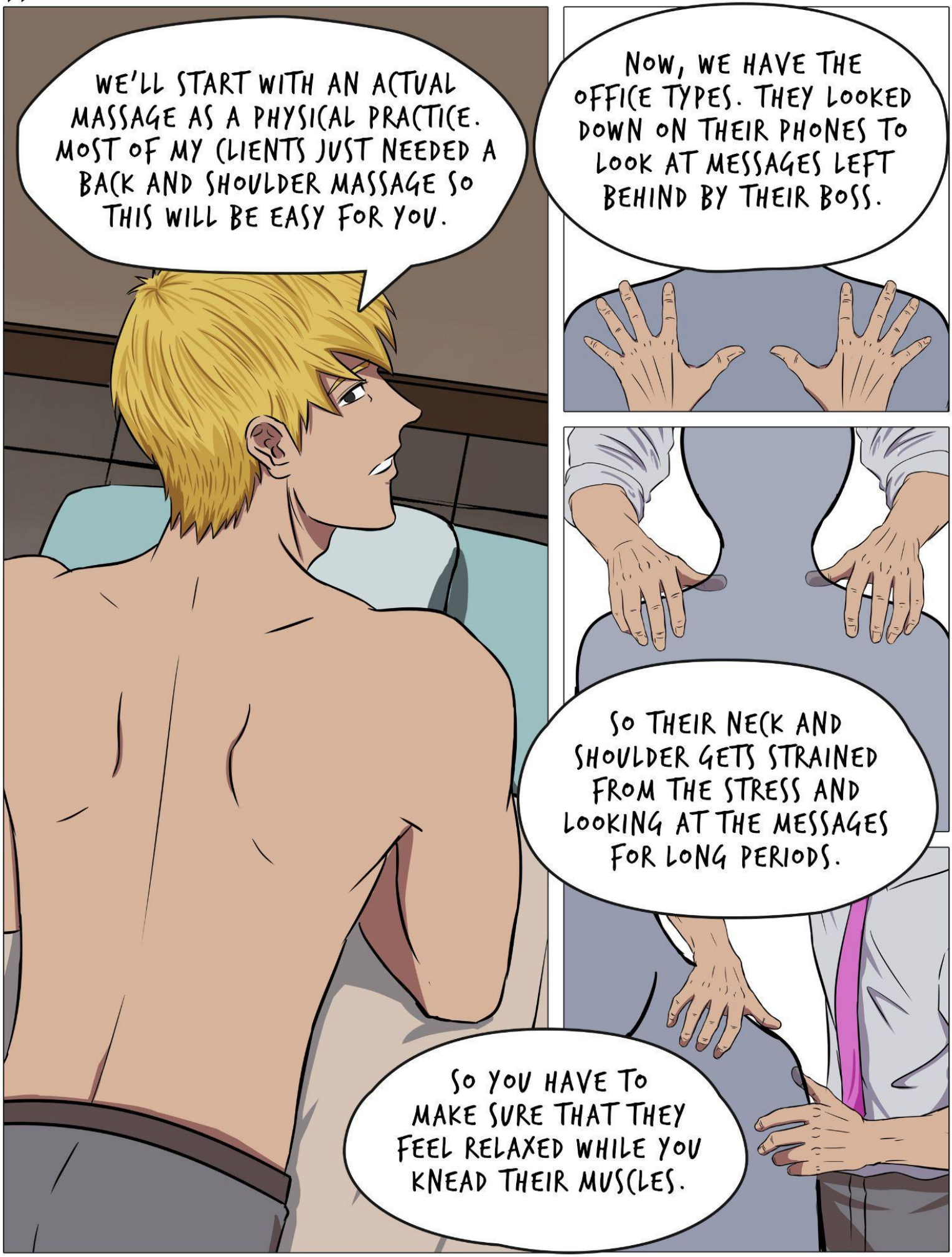
“But,” he interrupts before Dimple can say anything else. “If the two of you train together, I want to be there, too. Maybe I could learn something from the both of you.” He sets his worm down and straightens up. “And if Dimple tries anything weird, I’ll deal with him.”

“Haha, very funny, Shigeo.” Dimple crosses his arms and rolls his eyes. “After all we’ve been through together, you still don’t trust me. What a joke.”

Through his fuming expression, he sees the kids sharing a smirk.

Maybe he didn’t do *too* badly.

@emisnt_2


WE'LL START WITH AN ACTUAL MASSAGE AS A PHYSICAL PRACTICE. MOST OF MY CLIENTS JUST NEEDED A BACK AND SHOULDER MASSAGE SO THIS WILL BE EASY FOR YOU.
NOW, WE HAVE THE OFFICE TYPES. THEY LOOKED DOWN ON THEIR PHONES TO LOOK AT MESSAGES LEFT BEHIND BY THEIR BOSS.
SO THEIR NECK AND SHOULDER GETS STRAINED FROM THE STRESS AND LOOKING AT THE MESSAGES FOR LONG PERIODS.
SO YOU HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY FEEL RELAXED WHILE YOU KNEAD THEIR MUSCLES.

DON'T WORRY, YOU'LL GET USED TO IT!
WE'LL BE HELPING SO MANY CUSTOMERS BECAUSE OF YOU!
REIGEN-SAN SAID I CAN DO THIS.
IT'LL ALL BE MUSCLE MEMORY WITH ENOUGH PRACTISE.

I'VE ALREADY GONE THROUGH ALL THE TRAINING THAT REIGEN-SAN HAS TAUGHT ME.

I'VE TAKEN DOWN ALL THE NOTES. NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS JUST GETTING USED TO IT AND I'LL BE FINE.
RIGHT?

SPOTTED A FLYER SOME TIME AGO...

?~

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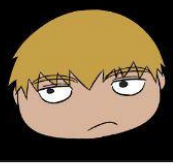
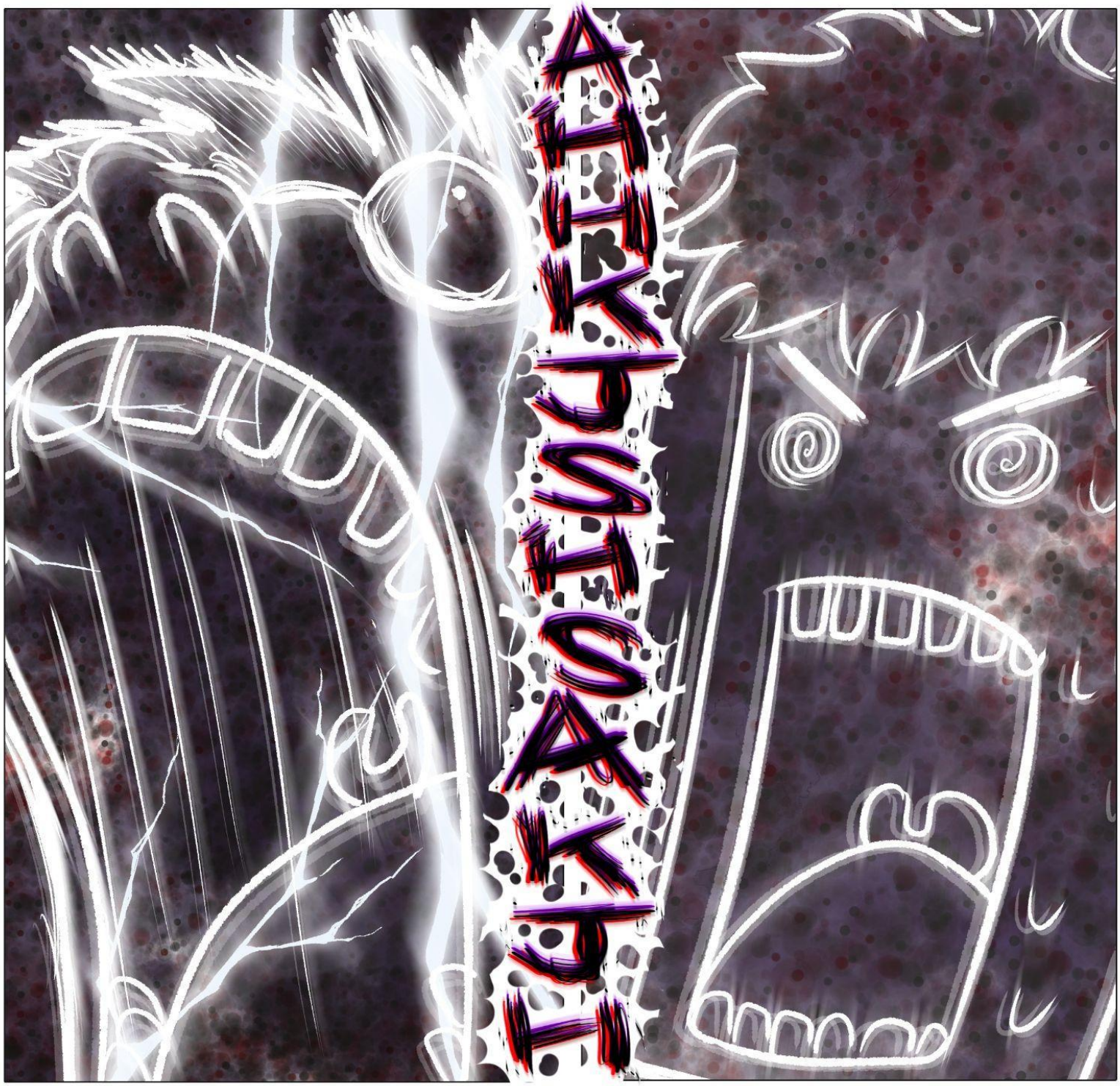


CONCLUSION:
NOT WORTH IT

Spiritual Divine Massage
¥6000

I CAN'T BELIEVE
I'M SUCH A GENIUS!

ALTHOUGH..
HE'S ODDLY QUIET RIGHT NOW.
HEY SERI-
WAIT SERIZAWA! No No No No No No-



REIGEN NEEDED TIME TO RECOVER FROM HIS LOWER BACK ACHE AFTERWARDS.

HELLO?

Beyond Body Improvement

By T1meslayer

Musashi Goda‘s form outstrips the modest concrete bench. His hulking thigh meat squishes up against the rough-cut granite bottom of a picnic table, set along the river that has long served as the Salt Middle School Body Improvement Club’s running path. He does everything in his power to sit like a normal human.

Luckily, years of maintaining peak physical fitness gives Musashi the self-awareness he needs to not snap his seat like a twig via the wrong distribution of weight. He does so without a second thought. Instead his attention is trained on the younger boy stretching in the grass before him, focus tempered by the cinnamon smell of gym chalk that burns his nostrils as hands fold over his mouth like a tent.

Mob currently has his lower body contorted into a halfhearted warrior pose. His arms stretch high, fingers laced to crack his knuckles toward the sky. The short-sleeve, collared tee that wraps his body in an embarrassingly ugly doodle of a monkey shows Musashi that Mob has more muscle definition than the last time they met.

That recognizable sting in his tear ducts is quickly dismissed. No need to get so emotional at the slightest sign of improvement, Musashi lies to himself.

“Kageyama.”

The stern comment passing through the gruff-voiced high schooler’s fingers leads Mob to immediately stop what he’s doing. Mob’s arms relax until both hands land atop his bowl cut, and he looks to Musashi with curious (some say naive) doe eyes.

“Hm?”

“You don’t have to prove anything to me, you know.”

Mob scrunches his face in confusion, and finally straightens out his posture to approach the table where his companion sits. The loose fabric legs of his cargo shorts brush with a soft scratching sound. “What do you-“

“I entrusted you with the Body Improvement Club for a reason, Kageyama.” Musashi lowers his hands to the table, feeling its gradual left-leaning slope. His shaggy sideburns are exposed. “If you only wish to arm wrestle because you believe I need convincing about your abilities, I won’t dignify the challenge.”

Confusion turns to surprise as Mob’s eyes change into those of a deer in headlights.

Sensing his thoughts are confirmed, Musashi grasps the table tight and prepares to leave the shady cover of a nearby red iron bridge. Micro-fractures ripple out from his thumbs as they bore into the granite.

“That’s not why I asked you here today, Musashi-senpai.”

The older boy immediately plants his half-raised rear flush against the seat again. Mob’s soft-spoken assurance and bright smile cause all of Musashi’s muscles to relax instantaneously.

Which is good. The tucked white button-up of his Peppercorn High School uniform– worn casually without its accompanying suit jacket and tie– is far easier to rip than his preferred workout attire.

“You see, since becoming vice captain of the Body Improvement Club, I decided to put more effort into holistic training.” Mob watches his spindly legs sidle between the stone table and chair, and then looks back at his companion upon sitting. “With my stamina up, I’ve been lifting weights too. I just wanted to show you the results of my training so far.”

Mob mimics every piece of media he’s ever seen by holding his right arm up, pulling back its sleeve with his left hand, and then flexing. The barest hint of a muscle shows on his otherwise lanky limb, and a bit of fuzz developing under his pit is exposed. This is enough to have the slim boy beaming.

***(Narrator’s Note:** Mob’s current workout routine involves lifting 10-pound dumbbells, or about 4.54 kilograms. This is approximately the weight of an adult cat.)*

Musashi is stunned silent. He stares at Mob, mouth agape, frizzy pillar of hair rustling in the breeze.

The burning sensation in his now-red eyes return, and a single tear rolls down Musashi's left cheek as he closes those eyes. One could swear the twinkling liquid is ready to ascend and burst into a new patch of stars that fills the potholes of an uncaring universe with an all-encompassing pride bursting from his seams. "Kageyama…"

Mob's enthusiasm trickles back toward concern seeing Musashi's somber expression and rolling tear. Luckily, it only lasts a moment. Soon Musashi's lids burst open to unleash a fiery gaze, chiseled features hardening as he puts on his most determined face. "I will never turn down such a strong showing of self-determination. Your challenge is accepted. And it always will be!"

The burly boy slams his right elbow on the table hard enough to kick up a cloud of silt. Veiny biceps bulge and twinge as Musashi holds out his hand; fingers taut as they curl inward like predatory claws. Hairline tears run across his sleeve until the waxy brown button holding his cuff pops off, pelting a tree before it lands in the river's soothing waters. The fabric unravels from there, blooming like flower petals to expose his musculature beneath.

"Come! Fight on, Kageyama!"

Mob swallows hard seeing the raw energy emanating from Musashi's statuesque form and glaring eyes. There's no turning back now.

He lines his arm in tandem with Musashi, more visibly uncomfortable with the rough surface digging into his elbow. Their hands clasp together, and Mob's is completely consumed by the broad, calloused palm of his former captain. Mob shivers and sweats, but he doesn't retreat.

Musashi's look of adoration says more than words ever could.

"Ready?"

Mob nods.

"Ready."

Another flex kicks up more dust on Musashi's side of the table.

As the arm wrestling match begins, Mob grasps the table's edge with his free hand for stability. He throws as much power behind his right arm as he can muster, enough so that he involuntarily gasps from the sudden strain. Mob catches his breath again with gritted teeth, and begins to grunt every few seconds of his assault.

Push, Shigeo. Push!

You've conquered cults.

Saved the world countless times.

Asked out the girl of your dreams, and survived the rejection.

You.

Can.

Do.

This.

All Musashi needs to do is hold his arm where it started. He is an impenetrable wall.

Though Mob never gains a single inch of ground on this battlefield, that doesn't mean he lost the war. Despite Musashi's stony face and seeming lack of effort, his mind races. He feels Mob's every fiber poured into this; he can literally feel it. Mob's face is red as a tomato, and his legs kick wildly under the table while trying to find a foothold in the grass. All this effort to make his presence known through the minutest fraction of a push.

Tears stream down both Musashi's puffed-out cheeks, breaking that stony expression as the high schooler swells with emotions. "I've never been more proud of a disciple, Kageyama."

Musashi suddenly thrusts his arm like a lever, and slams Mob's hand into the table. The younger boy gasps in shock and pain as the momentum sends him flying out of his seat. He tumbles cartoonishly down the grassy knoll toward the riverbed, yelping as his clothes and hair become more disheveled.

With his arm free, Musashi wipes his face using the tattered remains of his sleeve. Translucent stains linger in the white cotton as it absorbs his flood of tears.

~~~

Mob's bruised arm shutters as inch-by-inch, second by agonizing second, he raises a tantalizingly warm takoyaki ball by its bamboo toothpick skewer. It's a perfect bite, one with a beautiful swirl of mayo and just the right ratio of bonito flakes; the kind of bite that Reigen taught Mob to cherish.

Any moment spent with a perfect bite of takoyaki is better than a thousand paychecks, Reigen used to say.

Even then, Mob never believed his boss believed that pearl of wisdom.

The grassy green-scuffed boy's lower lip quivers as it draws the shaky morsel closer. He can feel the steam against his nose, smell every spice.

Then, it slides off the pick.

All of that beauty, gone in an instant. Lost to an anticlimactic plop in a half-empty cardboard boat tray.

Mob stares down inescapable tragedy. His arm is too sore to stay risen, and drops onto the exposed leg of his shorts. It covers a beige bandage.

For the first time in a long time, Mob's psychokinetic powers flare to life. His body glows iridescent and eyes glaze over. The lost takoyaki ball mimics his glowing kaleidoscope pattern before levitating the same trajectory upon which it fell. This time, it pops into Mob's mouth. He greedily gnashes through the soft, tender bite.

Psychic abilities are still useful for some minor conveniences.

Musashi watches the light show unfold before turning his attention back down to the button-up shirt folded over his lap. Every exposed chest and arm muscle flexes in a symphony as he lifts the shirt's sleeve and goes back to the delicate work of sewing its split fabric with old-fashioned needle and thread.
~~~

One of the most underrated skills honed by members of the Body Improvement Club: how to repair roughhoused clothing.

“Apologies for your injuries, Kageyama.” Musashi doesn’t lose a stitch as he talks. “For a moment I forgot you weren’t Hideki, or Ryohei, or Tenga.”

Mob pauses mid-chew and takes in the streets of Seasoning City, the lackadaisical atmosphere around Reigen’s favorite takoyaki stand. Teenagers in baggy outfits ignore one another comfortably on their phones. The old woman whose house he and Reigen once exorcized for a cockroach-sized sumo kappa walks her Spitz past a navy blue sedan. A set of parents brings their toddler home from school, lifting both arms to make her think she’s flying in that pretty purple dress.

He swallows his food, smiling.

“That’s okay. I can handle a few scrapes, and I’ve been meaning to wash this shirt.” Mob brings a hand to his stomach. The yellow fabric is still somewhat damp from the river. “Besides, I’m happy to be put in the same league as them.”

Musashi scoffs, nearing the cuff of his shirtsleeve. “Still. I hope this doesn’t affect any other plans this weekend.”

“No, nothing else strenuous, thankfully.” Mob flicks a finger, and another takoyaki flies into his mouth. He covers his chewing with one hand so as not to appear rude. “I have a meeting with Emi tomorrow, but I’m sure she won’t mind the bruises.”

The high schooler finally stops and looks up.

“Emi.” He runs his tongue along his lower lip, frizzy hair bobbing back-and-forth. “Wasn’t she that girl who pretended to go out with you?”

“We did actually go out briefly.” Mob mumbles around his mouthful, and then finishes it off. “But yes. I’m one of the few people who knows about her interest in writing, so sometimes she asks me to be something called a ‘beta reader’ for her.”

“Really?”

Mob nods. “Apparently I’m quite good at it. Honestly though, all I do is tell her about my thoughts and experiences as an Esper. She doesn’t know how to capture every detail for her protagonist.”

Musashi squints. His hum vibrates as he turns ever so slightly toward Mob on the wooden park bench they share. A white minivan drifts by, extending the silence. They bask in gasoline exhaust.

“So what you’re telling me, Kageyama, is there may still be romantic interest.”

“W-What?!”

The takoyaki boat tumbles out of Mob’s lap, his arms too wobbly and hands too creaky to catch the fumble. All three remaining balls roll down the sidewalk, trailing sauce into the cracks between paved squares.

“I- No!” Mob’s voice warbles as he loses his nerve. He tries to act nonchalant, lifting his litter with psychic energy so it can be deposited in a metal trash can nearby. Even this fails to pass muster, with the takoyaki following obscene sinusoidal waves. “It’s nothing- I mean, it can’t be anything like that. R-Right?”

Musashi accepts the error of his ways. He sets the unfinished sleeve down and jams his needle into a crochet pincushion shaped like a bowl of white rice.

“Shigeo.”

Mob’s encroaching panic subsides, replaced by a different sort of dread that pricks hairs up his neck. It wasn’t often that the former captain used his forename.

“If there’s one lesson I regret not drilling into you during my time at Salt Middle School, it’s this.” Musashi’s palm feels twice the size of Mob’s shoulder, even now.

The intricate mechanisms required to hold this muscular pulley are impressive to behold.

“’Body Improvement’ isn’t just about improving one’s body. One must also improve their mind– nay, their spirit– to hone the faculties necessary to wield that finely crafted physique. I’ve watched you grow more than most in a shorter time than all, Shigeo. The way you carry yourself is far and above the meek child who first joined us in that requisitioned clubroom.

“Yet, you haven’t fully escaped your chrysalis. It’s no fault of your own. We all have room to grow, in all things. But to keep growing, you must embrace life. In all things. To be your complete self, you must have a spirit unburdened. There’s no room for doubt. Run headlong into that good night. However that night appears to you.”

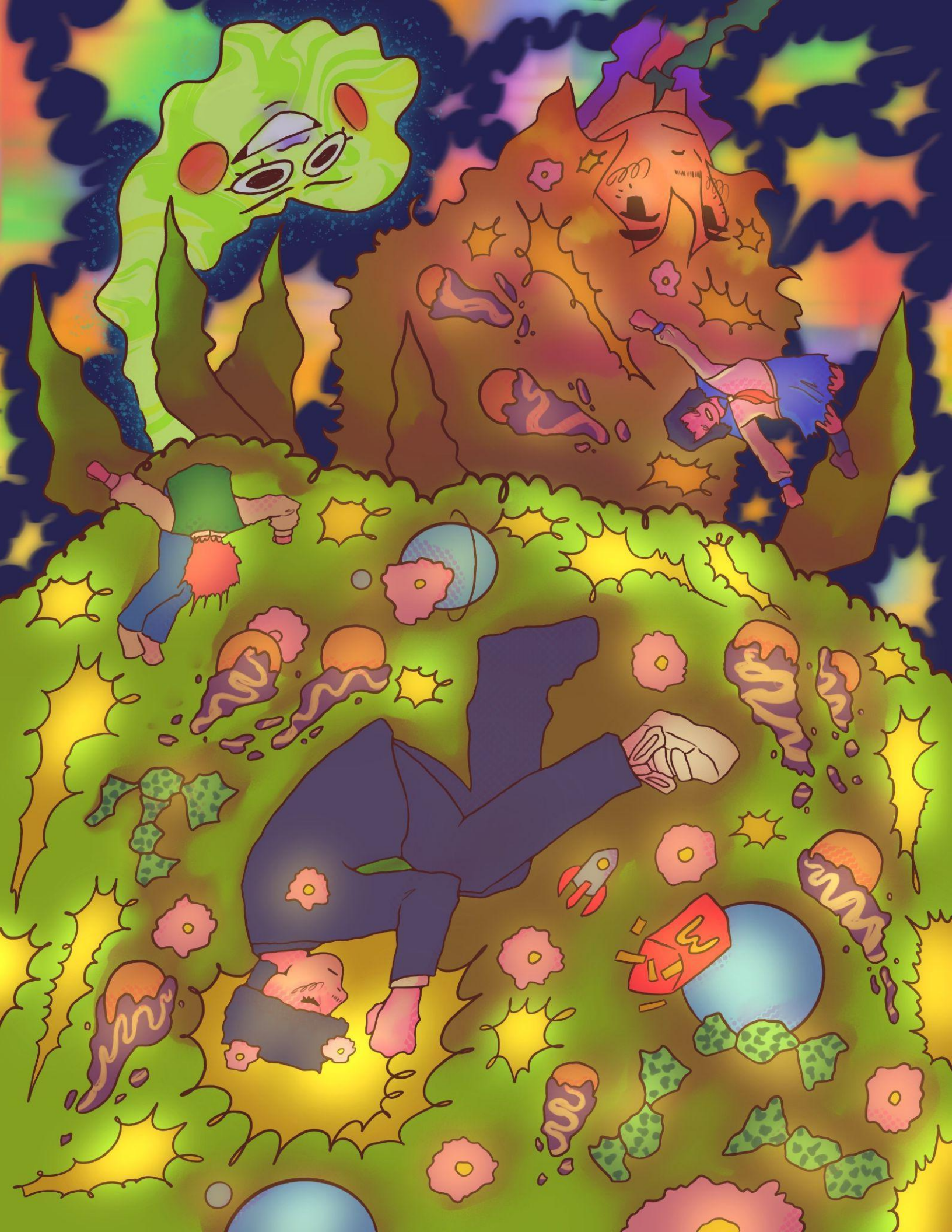
A doe drinks in the wisdom of its buck. “So… I should ask Emi out again?”

Musashi shakes his head. “You should do whatever it is your heart desires, Shigeo. Whenever it desires. And you should do it with all your being.”

He shifts Mob’s gravity when letting go of the rattled boy’s shoulder, and goes back to his project. The final stitch to reseal the shirt’s left arm.

“But probably don’t ask that girl out again,” Musashi grumbles. “You deserve better than someone who would play with your heart.”

SALT MIDDLE SCHOOL



霊とか相談所

Awakening Espers

By Nessa

Kurosaki Rei is uncannily good at Hide-and-Seek. Or at least that's what her classmates at Ground Mustard Elementary say.

More precisely, they like to say things like *'you're cheating!'* and *'not fair!'* even though Rei is the only one who doesn't pout and grumble whenever she's picked to seek. But that's the nature of children, and no one thinks much of it when the accuracy of it it's not so flawless for any adult to think she's more than a very intuitive kid.

Not even when the school takes them on a field trip to the local zoo and one of her classmates disappears from the group for long enough for her to notice, though not her teacher, busy as he is making sure to read out loud every word in the informative plaque for each exhibition.

She slips away quietly, stopping in front of a bifurcation of the path. The sign indicates the antelopes section on the left and tapirs on the right. Rei likes antelopes and she wouldn't mind seeing them again; nice things are always worth being looked at twice, don't they? But as she thinks about it, a soft breeze lifts her hair a couple of millimeters. She shakes her head. It's decided then.

When she finds her classmate staring at the tapirs with such sparkling eyes that she has the brief thought that the exhibit could go without illumination, she's not surprised, she simply extends a hand with a pout and startles him out of his reverie by reminding him that they're not supposed to separate from the group, or else their sensei will get upset and not take them on field trips anymore.

The boy's attention abandons the tapirs quickly, as it tends to happen at that age, and in no time they're back with the rest of their classmates in the petting section of the zoo.

"How did you find me?" She gets asked later.

"I had a feeling!" Rei replies with a good natured smile and it soon gets forgotten, lost in the excitement of shiny trinkets at the gift shop and sugary treats.

She never thinks anything about it either, even years later when her friends look intently at her while she tries to discern what's the best gachapon machine to invest on, occasionally shaking her head with such vigor that her hair fluttering without wind could be mistaken by the inertia of the movement.

She ends up settling on a machine with cute keychains, keeping a concentrated expression until an adorable rabbit plush keychain is on her hand. Her friends gape. "Woah, you look really focused when you do that, what's your secret?" They ask.

Rei once again smiles, tilting her head in consideration though there's nothing to reveal. "I suppose I'm just really good at guessing."

"That's not all you are, young lady!" The booming voice that makes her jump belongs to a man wearing an extravagant jacket with a swirly white and red pattern.

"Pardon me?"

"You're an esper!" The man pulls out a business card. *Mitsuura Kenji. Awakening Lab.* "Come find me if you want to find out more about your abilities!"

He's gone so fast that it feels as if he hadn't been here in the first place. Rei's friends chuckle nervously, wondering if it was a prank or perhaps just a weirdo, but to their surprise, she simply smiles.

Something tells her there's a 60% chance things will go just fine if she goes.

~~~

Hoshino Takeshi watches the carton sword in his hand break apart with the attitude of a tragedy actor.

"Ugh, *again,* Hoshino?"

"I-It was on purpose! The scene called for my character to accept his defeat with grace and his refusal to fight any further shows through the sword breaking, so *clearly* I had a perfect reason for-!"
~~~

The director's voice raises over his before he can finish his improvised argument– which he's very proud of, he thinks he deserves points on improv for that too. "Well, if that's the case, *clearly* you won't have any protests in replacing this prop yourself, will you, Hoshino?"

Realizing far too late he dug his own grave, Takeshi gulps. "I… no, of course not, Yamada-senpai."

A few people stop on their way out of the auditorium to pat him on the back, Tsurugi-senpai even telling him that the sword was a nice detail, but he knows she's saying it out of pity; everyone has seen this happen enough times for it to be anything else. Everything points to him having to spend another late night fixing something that isn't even his fault. But alas, that's the life of an artist.

And in the end, it's all worth it when he's finally in front of a captivated audience of parents, students and visitors alike.

He finishes his scene with a flourish, already imagining the applause his spectacular acting abilities will earn him once they are actually seen on stage among the adequate lightning and the perfect music to highlight the sentiment of his performance.

He can see a few members of the cast directing a thumbs up at him. This moment feels like something that has come out directly from his dreams.

Or, he thinks with an inversely proportional dread to the way in which his carton sword deflates with a soft crackle, one of his nightmares.

"A-And so! I will relinquish my weapons for the rest of my life!" He prays that the audience didn't hear the stutter and lets the sword fall to the floor.

There's a second of silence. And then, finally, mercifully, applause.

Takeshi is so relieved that when someone hands him a card afterward, he decides it must be a fan, accepting what surely must be the first of a long line of items he will be given to autograph in the future.

But it's not that, it's a business card. *Mitsuura Kenji. Awakening Lab.*

“You should come by to enhance your powers!” the man in front of him, who almost looks like he could have been a character in the play, says, hardly making the encounter any less confusing.

“My… powers?”

“What you did back there with the sword! That was telekinesis, and very impressive at that.”

“Oh… you really think so?” He asks, almost surprised at how sheepish he sounds.

“Most certainly! All the details are right there if you’re interested, please consider it.”

Takeshi thinks about it the entire week after the play. Perhaps he’s meant for the spotlight after all.

~~~

Asahi Go has always been one for dramatic gestures.

‘He has a big imagination’, his parents said ever since he was so small that he barely reached his mother’s waist, and Go always smiled wide and started sprouting a new tale about the things he had gotten up to in the playground.

This time he has been the hero that had saved them all from a monster! This other time he has been the valiant captain in charge during a shipwreck, but he has guided his men to safety and ensured their survival! He’s Go, the superhero, Go, the captain, Go, the ninja expert, Go anything and everything that his childish mind can conjure.

As the years pass, he never really stops finding reasons to praise himself, his father always talks about the importance of keeping one’s self-esteem high and Go is an attentive listener, though the daydreaming becomes more realistic as he grows up, his dreams more tangible, even if he has to admit that he isn’t the most athletic or the most clever amongst his peers.

In fact, there isn’t anything he really shines at, and he’s almost at risk of suffering a hit to his pride and reconsidering how special he really is when it happens.
~~~

'It' being an emphatic click of his fingers. A small flame that ignites so suddenly over his finger that Go ends up extinguishing in his panic.

His friends are as surprised as him, but at the end of the day they all dismiss it as a one-off incident… all except him, who runs into his room as soon as he gets home and clicks his fingers again and again until finally, fire is reborn out of stubbornness and sore fingers.

The pride he feels at that moment couldn't be compared to anything else. He's the best one at something very special after all! He doesn't hesitate to make use of his newfound talent.

"I can make fire with my fingers, do you want to see?" He says, over and over again to an audience that is a different amount of captivated depending on how many times he has performed his act in front of them.

This time, he decided to try it in front of a group of impressionable elementary schoolers– not because they're more likely to look at him in awe, it's because they just happened to be around, of course–, and he's sweating buckets, already in his fifth click of fingers when the flame finally comes to be.

"Ha! Do you see that?" A hand lands on his shoulder, startling him enough that the meager fire he had managed to conjure dies.

"I do, young man!" The man attached to the hand smiles a little too much for Go's nerves, but he can always appreciate enthusiasm for his act. "In fact, I have an offer for you."

Mitsuura Kenji. Awakening Lab. The legend on the card he's given doesn't sound exactly like the kind of recognition he has dreamed about ever since he can remember. But he supposes, a spark must start somewhere.

~~~

The Shiratori brothers have always been together.

Natural, given that they are twins. They've always been rather the quiet type, making people even question sometimes if there's something wrong with them, though Daichi and Kaito never let it get to them too much; no matter what, they'd always have each other.
~~~

Twins are always hard for people to understand after all.

It's convenient, how no one ever bothers them when they're playing together, even when they're silent, and how no one questions the way in which they inherently understand each other. They're twins, that's what everyone expects of them.

That every pair of twins in the world is able to communicate via telepathy is, therefore, a reasonable conclusion to make, Daichi argues, otherwise, why would telepathy be such a popular topic in movies and books? Kaito is bound to agree, though he's the one who offers the idea to contact other twins online so they can talk about their experiences.

It gets tiring when no one else understands how they can communicate from different sides of the room without saying one word. Well, turns out not even other twins understand that from them.

Daichi and Kaito don't let that get to them. Everyone always says bonds like theirs are unique, so perhaps it's that they're more united than other pairs of siblings what makes their connection stronger in this way. It's special, but in an ordinary way. They've been like this ever since they were born.

They don't reconsider that it could be something unusual until Daichi is standing outside of the convenience store, waiting for Kaito, who has gone inside to buy some cold treats to battle the burning sun, and he remembers that their mother asked them to get some milk on their way home.

The heat makes him feel rather sluggish, so he lets the impression of the petition and the item pass through his mind, and the acknowledgment of his brother from the other side of their connection makes him relax.

He can almost imagine it, Kaito saying "one second, Daichi just asked me to get something else". The cashier is used to their 'twin peculiarities'.

But not everyone is.

He feels the confusion before he sees his brother walking out of the store, an eccentric looking man on his toes.

“Ah, and here’s the other one!” There are people still impressed by the existence of twins, so this doesn’t weird Daishi out. “You guys are telepaths, aren’t you? Please come by my laboratories, I’m really interested in helping espers realize their full potential!” Now that catches his attention. He looks at his brother, who shrugs.

While he peeks at the words *‘Mitsuura Kenji. Awakening Lab’* together, Daichi already knows what Kaito is thinking.

~~~

The morning that welcomes five esper kids in the rather ordinary looking building that comprises the Awakening Labs is just as common looking as all of them. They were all requested to come by the same day, and they’re all looking at each other with different degrees of curiosity and confusion until the man of the hour comes outside and claps his hands together in delight.

“You all came! I’m so happy. My name is Mitsuura Kenji, it’s a pleasure to meet you all, but come in, come in!”

The amount of expensive looking equipment dazzles them all, but later they will all admit the existence of a rather cozy lounge is what made them all feel comfortable with the offer. They all take their seats.

“Will you all introduce yourselves, please?”

One by one, they do, uninterrupted other than the small intermissions Mitsuura decides to make, so everyone is on the same page, apparently.

“Kurosaki Rei, a pleasure.”

“You, my dear, are a clairvoyant.” She smiles wide, her hair almost seeming to sway a little.

“Hoshino Takeshi, at your service.”

“That’s our splendid telekinetic!” Takeshi seems to be having trouble not looking smug.
~~~

“Asahi Go, I’m a pyrokinetic master!”

“Ah, you came well informed, I see.” Go doesn’t even try to hide his smirk.

“Hello, my name is Shiratori Daichi, and this is my brother, Shiratori Kaito.”

“They’re telepaths,” Mitsuura concludes, almost as if he couldn’t believe it, just as the brothers nod perfectly synchronized.

The man stands once they’re all done.

“I’ve known about espers for a long time, you see, I wish to find out how they work, so I can one day become one of you!” He extends his arms. “What do you say? Will you help me? All the experiments we make here are perfectly safe, I assure you, and of course, you will be compensated for your time!”

The kids look at each other. All of them have already pondered what the man could possibly want with them before even calling him back, and this, one of many possibilities, is the best possible one.

“I would like that.”

“We are in!”

“You took that right out of my mouth.”

“My brother and I would like that.”

Mitsuura Kenji smiles wide and joyful. “Welcome on board! We’ll do great things together!”

To the five espers in the room, the words make them picture the future a little brighter than before.

CHERRYTERRY:)
. . .
!

Fight On!
Core schedule
6:15
7:30

danoriel

HAPPY BIRTHDAY REIGEN!
MUSHRATTING

SHE REJECTED ME.

Lemon Wafer
2023

A Test On Reliability

By Nessa

Despite Serizawa having been there when his dad was busy beating the shit out of him and later too, when the man was led away by that weirdly nonchalant government agent, it's possible that this is their most awkward encounter yet. They have even discussed their *mothers.*

Shou's only able to continue looking casual, leaning backwards with his elbows resting on the back of the chair, because the other looks so uncomfortable that he almost feels bad for meeting him at the local MobDonald's and not some secluded place like a taken-over factory or wherever it is that his dad deemed it fitting for his 'Ultimate Five'. He has to keep a groan from escaping him; if he didn't know better, he would have thought the old man was trying to be embarrassing on purpose.

"I should have helped you," Serizawa is saying softly.

"Don't bother," He says, pointedly not thinking about how much he had hated Serizawa the very second he had interfered in their fight. "We both know you wouldn't have won anyway."

"S-still! If I had gathered my courage earlier…"

"It's fine," The words come out a little more forcefully out of his mouth but he really wants him to drop the subject. "Besides, if you hadn't come in when you did, you wouldn't have saved that guy, right? What's his name again?" Perhaps at this point he should have already learned it, but it felt like an inconsequential detail in comparison to everything else surrounding him.

"Reigen-san?"

"That's the one," Shou clicks his fingers. He doesn't have to tell Serizawa that the man would have died if not for his intervention; almost *anyone* would have.

A moment of silence. Considering it's either that or apologies, Shou is pretty okay with that, content watching people eating their meals and talking about a million mundane things, as if their whole livelihood hadn't been threatened less than a few days ago. It must be nice. He's almost startled when the man speaks again.

"He offered me a job?" It doesn't sound like much of a statement but it must be, in part because it's Serizawa and in part because he seems to be fidgeting with something; a business card, he realizes.

"Really? Are you gonna do it?"

"I don't know… he didn't seem like a bad guy, but I thought the same about the President," Serizawa isn't looking at him but his voice sounds dark and weary. Shou says nothing. "I don't want to commit the same mistake twice but… what do you think?"

He shrugs. Unlike the 7th Division, after the little display the Seasoning City's esper did, he was more interested in the Kageyamas, not on the man with the borrowed powers. The other looks dejected at his answer though, it makes him feel a little bad.

"I know I have no right to ask this of you, but… could you… check?"

Shou blinks slowly. "What? If he's a good guy?"

Serizawa nods bashfully.

"I didn't notice… I didn't want to notice what was going on until it was too late. But you did," *Because it was my old man,* Shou wants to say, but Serizawa is looking so hopeful that it's hard to find the will to interrupt him. "If anyone would be a good judge of character, it would be you. Please?"

Shou considers it for a moment: He has time and absolutely no fucks to give about whatever Ritsu's brother's boss thinks of him. Plus, this gives him a chance to catch a glimpse at whatever the youngest of the Kageyamas has been doing lately. "Alright."

Serizawa's smile would be more rewarding if he didn't look like Shou just hung the stars on the sky.

~~~

Reigen Arataka opens the door to his office the first Monday after Suzuki Toichiro failed to take over the world, stares at the kid sitting on the couch with his feet over the little table in front of him, and closes it again.
~~~

Shou hears him mumbling to himself outside the door– probably double checking that he didn't get inside the wrong office by accident– before he enters once again. He doesn't even look put aback by his presence there, instead starting to gesticulate immediately in a series of meaningless gestures toward his back and then forward.

"We aren't open yet, didn't you see the sign?" He asks, not even asking how Shou got there, as if it were perfectly normal for him to be inside even without keys. "And get your feet off the table."

"Nah, I don't think I will."

"I wasn't asking."

"Neither was I."

They stare each other down. The hardest part is not keeping eye contact but keeping his laughter reigned in when he notices Reigen's fingers are fluttering in almost a ticking motion– as if he were counting the seconds.

Shou is about to call victory when the other starts squinting, but instead the man turns around with a huff, preserving his dignity as much as possible, he guesses. "What are you even doing in my office? Do you need an exorcism?"

He puts his arms behind his head, still without taking his feet off the table, which earns him a glare and Reigen stomping back to shove his legs off. "Pfff, no. I'm bored."

He puts his feet back up. One of the man's eyes starts twitching. "This isn't a daycare. Don't you have school or something?"

"Nope."

"Yeah, you wouldn't, with half the city destroyed," The man grumbles to himself, pushing Shou's legs off one last time before visibly giving up and raising a finger in his direction. "Alright, but I expect you to pull your weight, you hear me?"

Before Shou can begin to open his mouth to refuse– can't make it easy for him, after all; he's not going to show his true colors if he gets everything he wants–, there's a soft knock on the door.

“Excuse me? Are you open?”

Reigen’s attitude changes completely, from annoyed to pleasant and helpful in an instant as he crosses the room in big strides to open the door. “Ah, yes! Come in, come in.”

“I apologize for coming so early. I’ve just been so tired lately, I think a spirit must have latched onto me, you see, last week-” A middle aged woman comes into view, growing quiet as soon as her eyes land on Shou. “Oh, is this a bad moment?”

“Don’t worry about him. That’s my neighbors’ kid, I’m babysitting for them for the day.”

“I’m not,” Shou says loudly, not even looking away from where he’s counting cracks in the ceiling. “I don’t know him.”

Silence.

“Teenagers, am I right?” The man’s voice sounds strained and Shou doesn’t even put effort on keeping a chuckle from leaving him. “A-Anyway! You said you suspected you were being haunted by a spirit?”

The consultation goes without any issues… unsurprisingly since Shou is quick to notice there’s no spirit attached to that woman, but the self-proclaimed Greatest Psychic of the 21st Century makes a show of throwing salt around and rubbing her shoulders while decidedly ignoring Shou’s loud commentary of *‘did you buy that at the supermarket?’* and *‘he isn’t even doing anything, don’t let him charge you’*.

By the end of it, the woman looks satisfied enough to pay for that scam of a service, even after Shou huffs loudly at the mention of the ‘spirit reduction packages’.

“Don’t hesitate to come back if the spirit returns!” Reigen says as he waves her off.

“Or don’t! Hire a masseuse, they could do more for you than him!”

There’s a vein that wants to pop on the old man’s forehead, but his smile doesn’t drop until the door closes behind the woman and he can finally glare at him. “Hey, you could have cost me a customer back there.”

“So?” He raises an eyebrow. “There wasn’t even any spirit on her.”

“There was. It was just too powerful for you to see it,” The man retorts, resting one hand on his hip with way too much confidence for someone who’s sprouting such bullshit.

Shou hums. “So is that what you do? Scam people?”

"I help them," Reigen corrects him with a finger pointed up.

"By lying to them? I don't feel like you're helping me very much with that."

“Oh, so you *did* come for a consultation?” The man clicks his tongue. “That’ll have a cost.”

He stares until the other sighs and pinches his nose. “I’m trying to run a business here, you know?”

“An *exorcism* business? With no powers? I’m surprised no one has shut you down yet.”

"That's where you're wrong; that you can't feel them doesn't mean that they're not there," Reigen says, resting his chin between his thumb and his index.

"You don't though."

A snort and a dismissive hand gesture. He would be offended if it weren't a poor diversion. "How old are you? Like… ten? You still have so much to learn."

"You can't be *that* dumb."

"Hey! Respect your elders."

"My bad, I forgot you were ancient."

It's obvious he's not going to confess his lack of powers. Shou rolls his eyes and switches tactics, interrupting the rant about 'kids these days' and pointing at a random book on the bookshelf. *The Secret Language of Spirits.*

"What's that one about?"

Reigen's eyes follow the direction he's pointing at.

"Seriously… you could just pick it up and check yourself," He complains. "It's about communicating with spirits. Obviously."

"And what's that?"

“A Haniwa- Hands off! Unless you want to get a nasty curse.”

He shrugs, but puts the figure back where it was. "I could get rid of it easily."

"That doesn't mean it's alright to be reckless "

Shou doesn't think that's even worth a reply, since being lectured is not exactly what he came here for. Instead, he squints at a box of tea someone must have forgotten to put away. "Do your clients like that brand or are you just cheap?" He smirks, already knowing the answer.

"If you know how to prepare it right, you won't even notice that." Ha, he's not even denying it.

"Really?"

"Yes. Want me to teach you?"

"Nah. What about-?"

He spends the rest of the afternoon asking questions whenever there are no clients showing up. To his surprise, despite the immense amounts of grumbling, the man answers each one with only a certain amount of snark.

On Wednesday, after Shou has already snorted at the sight of Reigen giving someone life advice as if he knew what he was talking about and hadn’t pointed a toy gun at one of the most powerful espers in the world less than a week ago, someone comes in with an actual cursed amulet. He half expects the man to do a show with his dramatic gestures and send the old man home a few bills poorer without truly doing anything else, and while half of that is true, in the middle of the consultation he looks up and makes eye contact with him.

“Hey, kid, why don’t you come take a look?”

"Huh… alright?"

Reigen reaches a hand in his direction, putting a hand on his shoulder that Shou shrugs off easily. Undeterred, the man points to him as if he were emphasizing a point. "Shou will be assisting in the exorcism. As young as he seems, he happens to be my apprentice, though of course he's far from being on my level."

"You wish," The quip comes easily but without as much bite as he's used to, startled enough by the situation.

He half listens to the man sprout some bullshit about how his psychic level is high enough that he doesn't want to risk melting the amulet as he lifts the curse. That earns him a few pats on the back and a "well done", and that would be puzzling enough on its own but…

He gets invited along for ramen later.

~~~

The end of the week, and with it the end of his ‘assignment’, welcomes Shou with a surprising feeling of disappointment that he doesn’t let slip on his bored expression.

"Seems fine enough to me."

"Really?" Serizawa's face looks awfully hopeful. Shou looks away.
~~~

“Well, he isn’t planning on taking over the world, that’s for sure,” and he’s half certain that the man could do it, if not because of the weird charm that seems to disarm his clients left and right, then because he’s sure that the affection the con man carries for Ritsu’s brother goes both ways. He practically has the most powerful esper in the world at his beck and call but the way he talked about him… didn’t feel at all like the way in which Shou’s dad talked about *him.*

Worth based on care, not usefulness or skill. The thought makes him want to squirm.

"I can't thank you enough for this, Shou-kun!" Serizawa stands up to bow to him, which is uncomfortable on all sorts of different levels.

“Hey, no need for that!” He hurriedly says, looking around at the people who are now looking in their direction and promptly averting his gaze. The other isn’t doing it on purpose but damn if it isn’t embarrassing. “I had nothing better to do anyway.”

“S-Still-”

“Seriously, don’t sweat it. See you around,” He stands up, deciding that he’s had enough vaguely awkward interactions for one day and starts to walk away with a wave, half turning his head to look behind. “Oh, and Serizawa?”

“Yes?” Something about the man’s face makes Shou think about Claw. About people desperate to prove themselves, people who had to believe they were superior to everyone else or their façade would crumble to pieces. About loneliness and feigned camaraderie. Even back then Serizawa always looked that attentive when someone spoke to him, didn’t he? Even if it was Shou.

The feeling in his stomach could be described as longing but Shou likes to think it’s just some mild indigestion. If they’re going to be meeting regularly, they should pick a different spot than the local MobDonald’s, it’s doing a wreck on his gut. “Good luck.”

As he walks away, he pointedly doesn’t think about what it must be like to make a home out of the people you have by your side.

Credits

(In Order Of Appearance)

Psykoe 100 (Cover & Pg. 65)

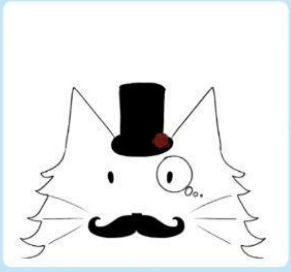
Psykoe100

desansen (Pg. 3)

desansen

SleepySquirrel (Pg. 4)

SleepySquirrel_



Stephanie (Pg. 5)

rosered962

Mewy101 (Pg. 6)

Mewy101

Banyu (Pg. 7)

rt_k100

Cryptiddotjpeg (Pg. 8)

cryptiddotjpeg

Pigifon (Pg. 9/10)

Pigifon

Emerizard (Pg. 11, 12 & 32)

Emerizard

Toyotas (Pg. 13-21)

Toyotas

Lunahras (Pg. 22)

Lunahrasdraws

Kalis (Pg. 23-26)

Kagilasgilas

MambyBambi (Pg. 27)

mambybambi

MugenCosmonaut (Pg. 28)

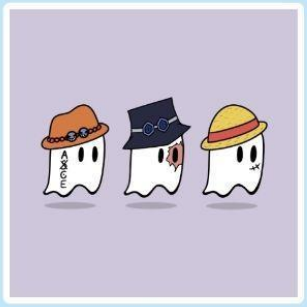
mugencosmonaut

Etherealbards (Pg. 29)

seacasters

Midnightlobo (Pg. 30-31)

midnightlobo



Kylie (Pg. 32)

kylieekaat

Lizaster (Pg. 32 & 58)

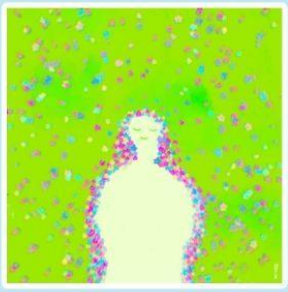
liz-aster

Creatorae (Pg. 32)

creatorae

Mintivee (Pg. 32 & 74)

mintivee



Muckingup (Pg. 32 & 110)

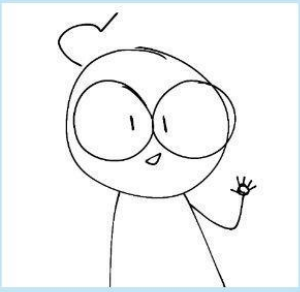
muckingup

Spaghetti4U (Pg. 32)

spaghetti4U

TobyTheTrashyArtist (Pg. 32 & 76)

tobytrashytrash



Hal (Pg. 33-37 & 108)

hananono

KiiroDora (Pg. 38)

seytanitogepi

Hazuki Tanuki (Pg. 39)

hazukitanuki

Shark (Pg. 40)

melonsharks

KittenexMachina (Pg. 41)

kittenexmachina

IPadKidThea (Pg. 42-43)

ipadkidthea

Aeriamamaduck (Pg. 44)

aeriamamaduck

DeepoBeepo (Pg. 45)

deepobeepo

Mal (Pg. 46)

graviitydraws

shkrimps (Pg. 47)

shkrimps

Jukes (Pg. 48-54)

abovo_adastra

Kelp (Pg. 55-57)

keip

Rook (Pg. 59)

etc_artwork

Ren (Pg. 60)

renanjaminp

Ryolightswan (Pg. 61)

ryolightswan

MrSheo (Pg. 62)

mrsheo

Dzasta15 (Pg. 63)

dzasta15

SpriteTheKnight (Pg. 64)

spritetheknight

Caw (Pg. 66-69)

cawthelesbian

Trashie_Can (Pg. 70)

trashie_can

Ceelisiowo (Pg. 71)

ceelisiowo

Driedacrylix (Pg. 72)

driedacrylix

Isha (Pg. 73)

rekteddd

Teamage (Pg. 75)

teamageart

ShortStoryLong113 (Pg. 77)

sh0rtst0ryl0ng

Damian Deamonne (Pg. 78)

ritzshou

Joe (Pg. 79)

roastedbeefed

Caro (Pg. 80-86)

uuchanjustice

Emi (Pg. 87)

2emisnt

Asoeiki (Pg. 88-92)

asoeiki

Moon (Pg. 93)

moonjelly._.fool

YSUH壱 (Pg. 94)

mangysuh

Hyriaven (Pg. 95)

hyriaven

TrikyArt (Pg. 96)

trikyart

T1meslayer (Pg. 97-104)

t1meslayer

Kayspnart (Pg. 105)

kayspnart

Egg (Pg. 106)

resxume

Lira (Pg. 107)

pakutheta

Loo (Pg. 109)

anartical

Matthew (Pg. 111)

pencilcase_prince

Love Goblin (Pg. 112)

love_goblinn

Taache (Pg. 113)

taache__

Nessa (Pg. 114-121 & 131-138)

thousand-winters

CherryTerry (Pg. 122)

cherryterry__

Kayy (Pg. 123)

kikayyam

Luz (Pg. 124)

samberrymochi

VelvetCat09 (Pg. 125)

cing_kucing

Tiana JRG (Pg. 126)

tianajrg

Dan Nation (Pg. 127)

danotiel

Mushratting (Pg. 128)

mushratting

Vex (Pg. 129)

vexfulfun

Lemon Wafer (Pg. 130)

waferlemon